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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CLXIII.

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE

LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

A ROMANCE

OF

PENDLE FOREST.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1849.

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BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS.

Sir Jeffery. — Is there a justice in Lancashire has so much skill in witches as I have? Nay, I 'll speak a proud word, you shall turn me loose against any Witch-finder in Europe. I 'd make an ass of Hopkins if he were alive.

SHADWELL.

BAYERISCHE STAATS-BIBLIOTHEK MÜNCHEN

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

BOOK THE SECOND.

[CONTINUED.]

[illegible]

THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONS

BAYERISCHE
STAATS-
BIBLIOTHEK
MUENCHEN

THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES.

BOOK THE SECOND.

CHAPTER VI.

The temptation.

SHORTLY after Richard's departure, a round, rosy-faced personage, whose rusty black cassock, hastily huddled over a dark riding-dress, proclaimed him a churchman, entered the hostel. This was the rector of Goldshaw, Parson Holden, a very worthy little man, though rather, perhaps, too fond of the sports of the field and the bottle. To Roger Nowell and Nicholas Assheton he was of course well known, and was much esteemed by the latter, often riding over to hunt and fish, or carouse, at Downham. Parson Holden had been sent for by Bess to administer spiritual consolation to poor Richard Baldwyn, who she thought stood in need of it, and having respectfully saluted the magistrate, of whom he stood somewhat in awe, and shaken hands cordially with Nicholas, who was delighted to see him, he repaired to the inner room, promising to come back speedily. And he kept his word; for in less than five minutes he re-appeared with the satisfactory intelligence that the afflicted miller was considerably calmer, and had listened to his counsels with much edification.

"Take him a glass of aqua-vitœ, Bess," he said to the hostess. "He is evidently a cup too low, and will be the

better for it.' Strong water is a specific I always recommend under such circumstances, Master Sudall, and indeed, adopt myself, and I am sure you will approve of it. — Harkee, Bess, when you have ministered to poor Baldwyn's wants, I must crave your attention to my own, and beg you to fill me a tankard with your oldest ale, and toast me an oat-cake to eat with it. — I must keep up my spirits, worthy Sir," he added to Roger Nowell, "for I have a painful duty to perform. I do not know when I have been more shocked than by the death of poor Mary Baldwyn. A fair flower and early nipped."

"Nipped, indeed, if all we have heard be correct," rejoined Nowell. "The forest is in a sad state, reverend Sir. It would seem as if the enemy of mankind, by means of his abominable agents, were permitted to exercise uncontrolled dominion over it. I must needs say, the forlorn condition of the people reflects little credit on those who have them in charge. The powers of darkness could never have prevailed to such an extent if duly resisted."

"I lament to hear you say so, good Master Nowell," replied the rector. "I have done my best, I assure you, to keep my small and widely-scattered flock together, and to save them from the ravening wolves and cunning foxes that infest the country; and if now and then some sheep have gone astray, or a poor lamb, as in the instance of Mary Baldwyn, hath fallen a victim, I am scarcely to blame for the mischance. Rather let me say, Sir, that you, as an active and zealous magistrate, should take the matter in hand, and by severe dealing with the offenders, arrest the progress of the evil. No defence, spiritual or otherwise, as yet set up against them, has proved effectual."

"Justly remarked, reverend Sir," observed Potts, looking up from the memorandum-book in which he was writing, "and I am sure your advice will not be lost upon Master Roger

Nowell. As regards the persons who may be afflicted by witchcraft, hath not our sagacious monarch observed, that 'There are three kind of folks who may be tempted or troubled: the wicked for their horrible sins, to punish them in the like measure; the godly that are sleeping in any great sins or infirmities, and weakness in faith, to waken them up the faster by such an uncouth form: and even some of the best, that their patience may be tried before the world as Job's was tried. For why may not God use any kind of extraordinary punishment, when it pleases Him, as well as the ordinary rods of sickness, or other adversities?'"

"Very true, Sir," replied Holden. "And we are undergoing this severe trial now. Fortunate are they who profit by it!"

"Hear what is said further, Sir, by the king," pursued Potts. "'No man,' declares that wise prince, 'ought to presume so far as to promise any impunity to himself.' But further on he gives us courage, for he adds, 'and yet we ought not to be afraid for that, of any thing that the devil and his wicked instruments can do against us, for we daily fight against him in a hundred other ways, and therefore as a valiant captain affrays no more being at the combat, nor stays from his purpose for the rummishing shot of a cannon, nor the small clack of a pistolet; not being certain what may light on him; even so ought we boldly to go forward in fighting against the devil without any greater terror, for these his rarest weapons, than the ordinary, whereof we have daily the proof.'"

"His majesty is quite right," observed Holden, "and I am glad to hear his convincing words so judiciously cited. I myself have no fear of these wicked instruments of Satan."

"In what manner, may I ask, have you proved your courage, Sir?" inquired Roger Nowell. "Have you preached

against them, and denounced their wickedness, menacing them with the thunders of the Church?"

"I cannot say I have," replied Holden, rather abashed, "but I shall henceforth adopt a very different course. — Ah! here comes the ale!" he added, taking the foaming tankard from Bess; "this is the best cordial wherewith to sustain one's courage in these trying times."

"Some remedy must be found for this intolerable grievance," observed Roger Nowell, after a few moments' reflection. "Till this morning I was not aware of the extent of the evil, but supposed that the two malignant hags, who seem to reign supreme here, confined their operations to blighting corn, maiming cattle, turning milk sour; and even these reports I fancied were greatly exaggerated; but I now find, from what I have seen at Sabden and elsewhere, that they fall very far short of the reality."

"It would be difficult to increase the darkness of the picture," said the chirurgeon, "but what remedy will you apply?"

"The cautery, Sir," replied Potts, — "the actual cautery — we will burn out this plague-spot. The two old hags and their noxious brood shall be brought to the stake. That will effect a radical cure."

"It may when it is accomplished, but I fear it will be long ere that happens," replied the chirurgeon, shaking his head doubtfully. "Are you acquainted with Mother Demdike's history, Sir?" he added to Potts.

"In part," replied the attorney; "but I shall be glad to hear any thing you may have to bring forward on the subject."

"The peculiarity in her case," observed Sudall, "and the circumstance distinguishing her dark and dread career from that of all other witches is that it has been shaped out by destiny. When an infant, a malediction was pronounced

upon her head by the unfortunate Abbot Paslew. She is also the offspring of a man reputed to have bartered his soul to the Enemy of Mankind, while her mother was a witch. Both parents perished lamentably, about the time of Paslew's execution at Whalley."

"It is a pity their miserable infant did not perish with them," observed Holden. "How much crime and misery would have been spared!"

"It was otherwise ordained," replied Sudall. "Bereft of her parents in this way, the infant was taken charge of and reared by Dame Croft, the miller's wife, of Whalley, but even in those early days she exhibited such a malicious and vindictive disposition, and became so unmanageable, that the good dame was glad to get rid of her, and sent her into the forest, where she found a home at Rough Lee, then occupied by Miles Nutter, the grandfather of the late Richard Nutter."

"Aha!" exclaimed Potts, "was Mother Demdike so early connected with that family? I must make a note of that circumstance."

"She remained at Rough Lee for some years," returned Sudall, "and though accounted of an ill disposition, there was nothing to be alleged against her at the time; though, afterwards, it was said, that some mishaps that befel the neighbours were owing to her agency, and that she was always attended by a familiar in the form of a rat or a mole. Whether this were so or not, I cannot say, but it is certain that she helped Miles Nutter to get rid of his wife, and procured him a second spouse, in return for which services he bestowed upon her an old ruined tower on his domains."

"You mean Malkin Tower?" said Nicholas.

"Ay, Malkin Tower," replied the chirurgeon. "There is a legend connected with that structure, which I will relate

to you anon, if you desire it. But to proceed. Scarcely had Bess Demdike taken up her abode in this lone tower, than it began to be rumoured that she was a witch, and attended sabbaths on the summit of Pendle Hill, and on Rimington Moor. Few would consort with her, and ill-luck invariably attended those with whom she quarrelled. Though of hideous and forbidding aspect, and with one eye lower set than the other, she had subtlety enough to induce a young man named Sothernes to marry her, and two children, a son and a daughter, were the fruit of the union."

"The daughter I have seen at Whalley," observed Potts; "but I have never encountered the son."

"Christopher Demdike still lives, I believe," replied the chirurgeon, "though what has become of him I know not, for he has quitted these parts. He is as ill-reputed as his mother, and has the same strange and fearful look about the eyes."

"I shall recognise him if I see him," observed Potts.

"You are scarcely likely to meet him," returned Sudall, "for, as I have said, he has left the forest. But to return to my story. The marriage state was little suitable to Bess Demdike, and in five years she contrived to free herself from her husband's restraint and ruled alone in the tower. Her malignant influence now began to be felt throughout the whole district, and by dint of menaces and positive acts of mischief, she extorted all she required. Whosoever refused her requests speedily experienced her resentment. When she was in the fulness of her power, a rival sprang up in the person of Anne Whittle, since known by the name of Chattox, which she obtained in marriage, and this woman disputed Bess Demdike's supremacy. Each strove to injure the adherents of her rival — and terrible was the mischief they wrought. In the end, however, Mother Demdike got the upper hand. Years have flown over the old hag's head, and her guilty career has

been hitherto attended with impunity. Plans have been formed to bring her to justice, but they have ever failed. And so in the case of old Chattox. Her career has been as baneful and as successful as that of Mother Demdike."

"But their course is well-nigh run," said Potts, "and the time is come for the extirpation of the old serpents."

"Ah! who is that at the window?" cried Sudall; "but that you are sitting near me, I should declare you were looking in at us."

"It must be Master Potts's brother, the reeve of the forest," observed Nicholas, with a laugh.

"Heed him not," cried the attorney, angrily, "but let us have the promised legend of Malkin Tower."

"Willingly!" replied the chirurgeon. "But before I begin I must recruit myself with a can of ale."

The flagon being set before him, Sudall commenced his story:

THE LEGEND OF MALKIN TOWER.

"On the brow of a high hill forming part of the range of Pendle, and commanding an extensive view over the forest, and the wild and mountainous region around it, stands a stern solitary tower. Old as the Anglo-Saxons, and built as a stronghold by Wulstan, a Northumbrian thane, in the time of Edmund or Edred, it is circular in form and very lofty, and serves as a landmark to the country round. Placed high up in the building the door was formerly reached by a steep flight of stone steps, but these were removed some fifty or sixty years ago by Mother Demdike, and a ladder capable of being raised or let down at pleasure substituted for them, affording the only apparent means of entrance. The tower is otherwise inaccessible, the walls being of immense thickness, with no

window lower than five-and-twenty feet from the ground, though it is thought there must be a secret outlet, for the old witch, when she wants to come forth, does not wait for the ladder to be let down. But this may be otherwise explained. Internally there are three floors, the lowest being placed on a level with the door, and this is the apartment chiefly occupied by the hag. In the centre of this room is a trap-door opening upon a deep vault, which forms the basement story of the structure, and which was once used as a dungeon, but is now tenanted, it is said, by a fiend, who can be summoned by the witch on stamping her foot. Round the room, runs a gallery contrived in the thickness of the walls, while the upper chambers are gained by a secret staircase, and closed by moveable stones, the machinery of which is only known to the inmate of the tower. All the rooms are lighted by narrow loop-holes. Thus you will see that the fortress is still capable of sustaining a siege, and old Demdike has been heard to declare that she would hold it for a month against a hundred men. Hitherto it has proved impregnable.

"On the Norman invasion, Malkin Tower was held by Ughtred, a descendant of Wulstan, who kept possession of Pendle Forest and the hills around it, and successfully resisted the aggressions of the conquerors. His enemies affirmed he was assisted by a demon, whom he had propitiated by some fearful sacrifice made in the tower, and the notion seemed borne out by the success uniformly attending his conflicts. Ughtred's prowess was stained by cruelty and rapine. Merciless in the treatment of his captives, putting them to death by horrible tortures, or immuring them in the dark and noisome dungeon of his tower, he would hold his revels over their heads, and deride their groans. Heaps of treasure, obtained by pillage, were secured by him in the tower. From his frequent acts of treachery, and the many foul murders he perpe-

trated, Ughtred was styled the 'Scourge of the Normans.' For a long period he enjoyed complete immunity from punishment, but after the siege of York, and the defeat of the insurgents, his destruction was vowed by Ilbert de Lacy, lord of Blackburnshire, and this fierce chieftain set fire to part of the forest in which the Saxon thane and his followers were concealed; drove them to Malkin Tower; took it after an obstinate and prolonged defence, and considerable loss to himself, and put them all to the sword, except the leader, whom he hanged from the top of his own fortress. In the dungeon were found many carcases, and the greater part of Ughtred's treasure served to enrich the victor.

"Once again, in the reign of Henry VI., Malkin Tower became a robber's stronghold, and gave protection to a freebooter named Blackburn, who, with a band of daring and desperate marauders, took advantage of the troubled state of the country, ravaged it far and wide, and committed unheard of atrocities, even levying contributions upon the Abbeys of Whalley and Salley, and the heads of these religious establishments were glad to make terms with him to save their herds and stores, the rather, that all attempts to dislodge him from his mountain fastness, and destroy his band, had failed. Blackburn seemed to enjoy the same kind of protection as Ughtred, and practised the same atrocities, torturing and imprisoning his captives unless they were heavily ransomed. He also led a life of wildest license, and, when not engaged in some predatory exploit, spent his time in carousing with his followers.

"Upon one occasion it chanced that he made a visit in disguise to Whalley Abbey, and passing the little hermitage near the church, beheld the votaress who tenanted it. This was Isole de Heton. Ravished by her wondrous beauty, Blackburn soon found an opportunity of making his passion known to her, and his handsome though fierce lineaments pleasing

her, he did not long sigh in vain. He frequently visited her in the garb of a Cistertian monk, and, being taken for one of the brethren, his conduct brought great scandal upon the abbey. The abandoned votaress bore him a daughter, and the infant was conveyed away by the lover, and placed under the care of a peasant's wife, at Barrowford. From that child sprung Bess Blackburn, the mother of old Demdike; so that the witch is a direct descendant of Isole de Heton.

"Notwithstanding all precautions, Isole's dark offence became known, and she would have paid the penalty of it at the stake, if she had not fled. In scaling Whalley Nab, in the woody heights of which she was to remain concealed till her lover could come to her, she fell from a rock, shattering her limbs, and disfiguring her features. Some say she was lamed for life, and became as hideous as she had heretofore been lovely; but this is erroneous, for apprehensive of such a result, attended by the loss of her lover, she invoked the powers of darkness, and proffered her soul in return for five years of unimpaired beauty.

"The compact was made, and when Blackburn came he found her more beautiful than ever. Enraptured, he conveyed her to Malkin Tower, and lived with her there in security, laughing to scorn the menaces of Abbot Eccles, by whom he was excommunicated.

"Time went on, and as Isole's charms underwent no change, her lover's ardour continued unabated. Five years passed in guilty pleasures, and the last day of the allotted term arrived. No change was manifest in Isole's demeanour; neither remorse nor fear were exhibited by her. Never had she appeared more lovely—never in higher or more exuberant spirits. She besought her lover, who was still madly intoxicated by her infernal charms, to give a banquet that night to ten of his trustiest followers. He willingly assented, and bade

them to the feast. They ate and drank merrily, and the gayest of the company was the lovely Isole. Her spirits seemed somewhat too wild even to Blackburn, but he did not check her, though surprised at the excessive liveliness and freedom of her sallies. Her eyes flashed like fire, and there was not a man present but was madly in love with her, and ready to dispute for her smiles with his captain.

"The wine flowed freely, and song and jest went on till midnight. When the hour struck, Isole filled a cup to the brim, and called upon them to pledge her. All arose, and drained their goblets enthusiastically. 'It was a farewell cup,' she said. 'I am going away with one of you.' 'How?' exclaimed Blackburn, in angry surprise. 'Let any one but touch your hand, and I will strike him dead at my feet.' The rest of the company regarded each other with surprise, and it was then discovered that a stranger was amongst them; a tall dark man, whose looks were so terrible and demoniacal that no one dared lay hands upon him. 'I am come,' he said, with fearful significance, to Isole. 'And I am ready,' she answered, boldly. 'I will go with you were it to the bottomless pit,' cried Blackburn, catching hold of her. 'It is thither I am going,' she answered with a scream of laughter. 'I shall be glad of a companion.'

"When the paroxysm of laughter was over, she fell down on the floor. Her lover would have raised her, when what was his horror to find that he held in his arms an old woman, with frightfully disfigured features, and evidently in the agonies of death. She fixed one look upon him, and expired.

"Terrified by the occurrence the guests hurried away, and when they returned next day, they found Blackburn, stretched on the floor, and quite dead. They cast his body, together with that of the wretched Isole, into the vault

beneath the room where they were lying, and then taking possession of his treasure, removed to some other retreat.

"Thenceforth, Malkin Tower became haunted. Though wholly deserted, lights were constantly seen shining from it at night, and sounds of wild revelry succeeded by shrieks and groans issued from it. The figure of Isole was often seen to come forth, and flit across the wastes in the direction of Whalley Abbey. On stormy nights a huge black cat, with flaming eyes, was frequently descried on the summit of the structure, whence it obtained its name of Grimalkin, or Malkin Tower. The ill-omened pile ultimately came into the possession of the Nutter family, but it was never tenanted, until assigned, as I have already mentioned, to Mother Demdike."

The chirurgeon's marvellous story was listened to with great attention by his auditors. Most of them were familiar with different versions of it, but to Master Potts it was altogether new, and he made rapid notes of it, questioning the narrator as to one or two points which appeared to him to require explanation. Nicholas, as may be supposed, was particularly interested in that part of the legend, which referred to Isole de Heton. He now for the first time heard of her unhallowed intercourse with the freebooter Blackburn, of her compact on Whalley Nab with the fiend, of her mysterious connection with Malkin Tower, and of her being the ancestress of Mother Demdike. The consideration of all these points, coupled with a vivid recollection of his own strange adventure with the impious votaress at the Abbey on the previous night, plunged him into a deep train of thought, and he began seriously to consider whether he might not have committed some heinous sin, and, indeed, jeopardised his soul's welfare by dancing with her. "What if I should share the same fate

as the robber Blackburn," he ruminated "and be dragged to perdition by her? It is a very awful reflection. But though my fate might operate as a warning to others, I am by no means anxious to be held up as a moral scarecrow. Rather let me take warning myself, amend my life, abandon intemperance, which leads to all manner of wickedness, and suffer myself no more to be ensnared by the wiles and delusions of the tempter in the form of a fair woman. No — no — I will alter and amend my life."

I regret, however, to say that these praiseworthy resolutions were but transient, and that the squire, quite forgetting that the work of reform, if intended to be really accomplished, ought to commence at once, and by no means be postponed till the morrow, yielded to the seductions of a fresh pottle of sack which was presented to him at the moment by Bess, and in taking it could not help squeezing the hand of the bouncing hostess, and gazing at her more tenderly than became a married man. Oh! Nicholas — Nicholas — the work of reform, I am afraid, proceeds very slowly and imperfectly with you. Your friend, Parson Dewhurst, would have told you that it is much easier to form good resolutions than to keep them.

Leaving the squire, however, to his cogitations and his sack, the attorney to his memorandum-book, in which he was still engaged in writing, and the others to their talk, we shall proceed to the chamber whither the poor miller had been led by Bess. When visited by the rector, he had been apparently soothed by the worthy man's consolatory advice, but when left alone he speedily relapsed into his former dark and gloomy state of mind. He did not notice Bess, who, according to Holden's directions, placed the aqua-vitæ bottle before him, but as long as she stayed, remained with his face buried in his hands. As soon as she was gone he arose, and began

to pace the room to and fro. The window was open, and he could hear the funeral bell tolling mournfully at intervals. Each recurrence of the dismal sound added sharpness and intensity to his grief. His sufferings became almost intolerable, and drove him to the very verge of despair and madness. If a weapon had been at hand, he might have seized it, and put a sudden period to his existence. His breast was a chaos of fierce and troubled thoughts, in which one black and terrible idea arose and overpowered all the rest. It was the desire of vengeance, deep and complete, upon her whom he looked upon as the murderess of his child. He cared not how it were accomplished so it were done, but such was the opinion he entertained of the old hag's power, that he doubted his ability to the task. Still, as the bell tolled on, the furies at his heart lashed and goaded him on, and yelled in his ear revenge — revenge. Now, indeed he was crazed with grief and rage; he tore off handfuls of hair, plunged his nails deeply into his breast, and while committing these and other wild excesses, with frantic imprecations, he called down Heaven's judgments on his own head. He was in that lost and helpless state when the enemy of mankind has power over man. Nor was the opportunity neglected, for when the wretched Baldwyn, who exhausted by the violence of his motions, had leaned for a moment against the wall, he perceived to his surprise that there was a man in the room — a small personage attired in rusty black, whom he thought had been one of the party in the adjoining chamber.

There was an expression of mockery about this person's countenance which did not please the miller, and he asked him, sternly, what he wanted.

"Leave off grinnin, mon," he said, fiercely, "or ey may be tempted to tay yo be t' throttle, an may yo laugh o't wrong side o' your mouth "

"No, no, you will not, Richard Baldwyn, when you know my errand," replied the man. "You are thirsting for vengeance upon Mother Demdike. You shall have it."

"Eigh, eigh, you promised me vengeance efore," cried the miller — "vengeance by the law. Boh ey mun wait lung for it. Ey wad ha' it swift and sure — deep an deadly. Ey wad blast her wi' curses, os hoo blasted my poor Meary. Ey wad strike her deeod at my feet. That 's my vengeance, mon."

"You shall have it," replied the other.

"Yo talk differently fro' what yo did just now, mon," said the miller, regarding him narrowly and distrustfully. "An yo look differently too. There 's a queer glimmer abowt your een that ey didna notice efore, an that ey mislike."

The man laughed bitterly.

"Leave off grinnin' or begone," cried Baldwyn, furiously. And he raised his hand to strike the man, but he instantly dropped it, appalled by a look which the other threw at him. "Who the Dule are yo?"

"The Dule must answer you, since you appeal to him," replied the other, with the same mocking smile; "but you are mistaken in supposing you have spoken to me before. He with whom you conversed in the other room, resembles me in more respects than one, but he does not possess power equal to mine. The law will not aid you against Mother Demdike. She will escape all the snares laid for her. But she will not escape *me*."

"Who are ye?" cried the miller, his hair erecting on his head, and cold damps breaking out upon his brow. "Yo are nah mortal, an nah good, to tawk i' this fashion."

"Heed not who and what I am," replied the other, "I am known here as a reeve of the forest — that is enough. Would you have vengeance on the murtheress of your child?"

"Yeigh," rejoined Baldwyn.

"And you are willing to pay for it at the price of your soul?" demanded the other, advancing towards him.

Baldwyn reeled. He saw at once the fearful peril in which he was placed, and averted his gaze from the scorching glance of the reeve.

At this moment the door was tried without, and the voice of Bess was heard, saying, "Who ha' yo got wi' yo, Ruchot; an whoy ha' yo fastened t' door?"

"Your answer?" demanded the reeve.

"Ey canna gi' it now," replied the miller. "Come in, Bess; come in."

"Ey conna," she replied. "Open t' door, mon."

"Your answer, I say?" said the reeve.

"Gi' me an hour to think on't," said the miller.

"Agreed," replied the other. "I will be with you after the funeral."

And he sprang through the window, and disappeared before Baldwyn could open the door and admit Bess.

CHAPTER VII.

The perambulation of the boundaries.

The lane, along which Richard Assheton galloped, in pursuit of Mother Chattox, made so many turns, and was, moreover, so completely hemmed in by high banks and hedges, that he could see nothing on either side of him, and very little in advance; but, guided by the clatter of hoofs, he urged Merlin to his utmost speed, fancying he should soon come up with the fugitives. In this, however, he was deceived. The sound that had led him on became faieter and fainter, till at last it died away altogether; and on quitting the lane and

gaining the moor, where the view was wholly uninterrupted, no traces either of witch or reeve could be discerned.

With a feeling of angry disappointment, Richard was about to turn back, when a large black grayhound came from out an adjoining clough, and made towards him. The singularity of the circumstance induced him to halt and regard the dog with attention. On nearing him, the animal looked wistfully in his face, and seemed to invite him to follow, and the young man was so struck by the dog's manner that he complied, and had not gone far, when a hare, of unusual size and gray with age, bounded from beneath a gorse-bush, and speeded away, the grayhound starting in pursuit.

Aware of the prevailing notion that a witch most commonly assumed such a form when desirous of escaping, or performing some act of mischief, such as drying the milk of kine, Richard at once came to the conclusion that the hare could be no other than Mother Chattox, and without pausing to inquire what the hound could be, or why it should appear at such a singular and apparently fortunate juncture, he at once joined the run, and cheered on the dog with whoop and holloa.

Old as it was, apparently, the hare ran with extraordinary swiftness, clearing every stone wall and other impediment in the way, and more than once cunningly doubling upon its pursuers. But every feint and stratagem were defeated by the fleet and sagacious hound, and the hunted animal at length took to the open waste, where the run became so rapid, that Richard had enough to do to keep up with it, though Merlin, almost as furiously excited as his master, strained every sinew to the task.

In this way the chasers and the chased scoured the dark and heathy plain, skirting moss-pool, and clearing dyke, till they almost reached the butt-end of Pendle Hill, which rose like an impassable barrier before them. Hitherto, the chances

had seemed in favour of the hare, but they now began to turn, and as it seemed certain she must fall into the hound's jaws, Richard expected every moment to find her resume her natural form. The run having brought him within a quarter of a mile of Barley, the rude hovels composing which little booth were clearly discernible, the young man began to think the hag's dwelling must be among them, and that she was hurrying thither as to a place of refuge. But before this could be accomplished he hoped to effect her capture, and once more cheered on the hound, and plunged his spurs into Merlin's sides. An obstacle, however, occurred which he had not counted on. Directly in the course taken by the hare lay a deep, disused, limestone quarry, completely screened from view by a fringe of brush-wood. When within a few yards of this pit the hound made a dash at the flying hare, but eluding him, the latter sprang forward, and both went over the edge of the quarry together. Richard had well-nigh followed, and in that case would have been inevitably dashed in pieces; but, discovering the danger ere it was too late, by a powerful effort, which threw Merlin upon his haunches', he pulled him back on the very brink of the pit.

The young man shuddered as he gazed into the depths of the quarry, and saw the jagged points and heaps of broken stone that would have received him; but he looked in vain for the old witch, whose mangled body, together with that of the hound, he expected to behold; and he then asked himself whether the chase might not have been a snare set for him by the hag and her familiar, with the intent of luring him to destruction. If so, he had been providentially preserved.

Quitting the pit, his first idea was to proceed to Barley, which was now only a few hundred yards off, to make inquiries respecting Mother Chattox, and ascertain whether she really dwelt there, but on further consideration he judged it best to

return without further delay to Goldshaw, lest his friends, ignorant as to what had befallen him, might become alarmed on his account, but he resolved, as soon as he had disposed of the business in hand, to prosecute his search after the hag. Riding rapidly, he soon cleared the ground between the quarry and Goldshaw Lane, and was about to enter the latter, when the sound of voices, singing a funeral hymn, caught his ear, and, pausing to listen to it, he beheld a little procession, the meaning of which he readily comprehended, wending its slow and melancholy way in the same direction as himself. It was headed by four men in deep mourning, bearing upon their shoulders a small coffin, covered with a pall, and having a garland of white flowers in front of it. Behind them followed about a dozen young men and maidens, likewise in mourning, walking two and two, with gait and aspect of unfeigned affliction. Many of the women, though merely rustics, seemed to possess considerable personal attraction, but their features were in a great measure concealed by their large white kerchiefs disposed in the form of hoods. All carried sprigs of rosemary and bunches of flowers in their hands. Plaintive was the hymn they sang, and their voices, though untaught, were sweet and touching, and went to the heart of the listener.

Much moved, Richard suffered the funeral procession to precede him along the deep and devious lane, and as it winded beneath the hedges, the sight was inexpressibly affecting. Fastening his horse to a tree, at the end of the lane, Richard followed on foot. Notice of the approach of the train having been given in the village, all the inhabitants flocked forth to meet it, and there was scarcely a dry eye among them. Arrived within a short distance of the church, the coffin was met by the minister attended by the clerk, behind whom came Roger Nowell, Nicholas, and the rest of the company from the hostel. With great difficulty poor Baldwyn could be

brought to take his place as chief mourner. These arrangements completed, the body of the ill-fated girl was borne into the church-yard, the minister reading the solemn texts appointed for the occasion, and leading the way to the grave, beside which stood the sexton, together with the beadle of Goldshaw and Sparshot. The coffin was then laid on trestles, and amidst profound silence, broken only by the sobs of the mourners, the service was read, and preparations made for lowering the body into the grave.

Then it was that poor Baldwyn, with a wild, heart-piercing cry, flung himself upon the shell containing all that remained of his lost treasure, and could with difficulty be removed from it by Bess and Sudall, both of whom were in attendance. The bunches of flowers and sprigs of rosemary having been laid upon the coffin by the maidens, amidst loud sobbing and audibly expressed lamentations from the bystanders, it was let down into the grave, and earth thrown over it.

Earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust.

The ceremony was over, the mourners betook themselves to the little hostel, and the spectators slowly dispersed, but the bereaved father still lingered, unable to tear himself away. Leaning for support against the yew tree, he fiercely bade Bess, who would have led him home with her, begone. The kind-hearted hostess complied in appearance, but remained nigh at hand, though concealed from view.

Once more the dark cloud overshadowed the spirit of the wretched man — once more the same infernal desire of vengeance possessed him — once more he subjected himself to temptation. Striding to the foot of the grave he raised his hand, and with terrible imprecations vowed to lay the murtheress of his child as low as she herself was now laid. At that moment he felt an eye like a burning glass fixed upon him, and

looking up beheld the reeve of the forest standing on the further side of the grave.

"Kneel down, and swear to be mine, and your wish shall be gratified," said the reeve.

Beside himself with grief and rage, Baldwyn would have complied, but he was arrested by a powerful grasp. Fearing he was about to commit some rash act, Bess rushed forward and caught hold of his doublet.

"Bethink thee whot theaw has just heerd fro' t' minister, Ruchot," she cried, in a voice of solemn warning. "'Blessed are the dead that dee i' the Lord, for they rest fro their labours.' An again, 'Suffer us not at our last hour, for onny pains o' death to fa' fro thee.' Oh, Ruchot, dear, fo' the love theaw hadst fo' thy poor chilt, who is now delivert fro' the burthen o' th' flesh, an' dwellin' i' joy an felicity wi' God an his angels, dunna endanger thy precious sowl. Pray that theaw may'st depart hence i' th' Lord, wi' whom are the sowls of the faithful, an Meary's, ey trust, among the number. Pray that thy eend may be like hers."

"Ey conna pray, Bess," replied the miller, striking his breast. "The Lord has turned his feace fro' me."

"Becose thy heart is hardened, Ruchot," she replied. "Theaw'rt nourishin' nowt boh black an wicked thowts. Cast em off ye, I adjure thee, an come whoam wi' me."

Meanwhile, the reeve had sprung across the grave.

"Thy answer at once," he said, grasping the miller's arm, and breathing the words in his ears. "Vengeance is in thy power. A word, and it is thine."

The miller groaned bitterly. He was sorely tempted.

"What is that mon sayin' to thee, Ruchot?" inquired Bess.

"Dunna ax, boh tak me away," he answered "Ey am lost else."

"Let him lay a finger on yo if he dare," said Bess, sturdily.

"Leave him alone — yo dunna knoa who he is," whispered the miller.

"Ey con partly guess," she rejoined; "boh ey care nother fo' mon nor dule when ey'm acting reetly. Come along wi' me, Ruchot."

"Fool!" cried the reeve, in the same low tone as before; "you will lose your revenge, but you will not escape me."

And he turned away, while Bess almost carried the trembling and enfeebled miller towards the hostel.

Roger Nowell and his friends had only waited the conclusion of the funeral to set forth, and their horses being in readiness, they mounted them on leaving the church-yard, and rode slowly along the lane leading towards Rough Lee. The melancholy scene they had witnessed, and the afflicting circumstances connected with it, had painfully affected the party, and little conversation occurred until they were overtaken by Parson Holden, who having been made acquainted with their errand by Nicholas, was desirous of accompanying them. Soon after this, also, the reeve of the forest joined them, and on seeing him, Richard sternly demanded why he had aided Mother Chattox in her flight from the church-yard, and what had become of her.

"You are entirely mistaken, Sir," replied the reeve, with affected astonishment. "I have seen nothing whatever of the old hag, and would rather lend a hand to her capture than abet her flight. I hold all witches in abhorrence, and Mother Chattox especially so."

"Your horse looks fresh enough, certainly," said Richard, somewhat shaken in his suspicions. "Where have you been during our stay at Goldshaw? You did not put up at the hostel?"

"I went to Farmer Johnson's," replied the reeve, "and you will find upon inquiry that my horse has not been out of

his stables for the last hour. I myself have been loitering about Bess's grange and farm-yard, as your grooms will testify, for they have seen me."

"Humph!" exclaimed Richard, "I suppose I must credit assertions made with such confidence, but I could have sworn I saw you ride off with the hag behind you."

"I hope I shall never be caught in such bad company, Sir," replied the reeve, with a laugh. "If I ride off with any one it shall not be with an old witch, depend upon it."

Though by no means satisfied with the explanation, Richard was forced to be content with it; but he thought he would address a few more questions to the reeve.

"Have you any knowledge," he said, "when the boundaries of Pendle Forest were first settled and appointed?"

"The first perambulation was made by Henry de Lacy, about the middle of the twelfth century," replied the reeve. "Pendle Forest, you may be aware, Sir, is one of the four divisions of the great forest of Blackburnshire, of which the Lacys were lords, the three other divisions being Accrington, Trawden, and Rossendale, and it comprehends an extent of about twenty-five miles, part of which you have traversed to-day. At a later period, namely in 1311, after the death of another Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, the last of his line, and one of the bravest of Edward the First's barons, an inquisition was held in the forest, and it was subdivided into eleven vaccaries, one of which is the place to which you are bound, Rough Lee."

"The learned Sir Edward Coke defines a vaccary to signify a dairy," observed Potts.

"Here it means the farm and land as well," replied the reeve; "and the word 'booth,' which is in general use in this district, signifies the mansion erected upon such vaccary: Mistress Nutter's residence, for instance, being nothing more

than the booth of Rough Lee: while a 'lawnd,' another local term, is a park inclosed within the forest, for the preservation of the deer, and the convenience of the chace, and of such inclosures we have two, namely, the Old and New Lawnd. By a commission in the reign of Henry VII., these vaccaries originally granted only to tenants at will, were converted into copyholds of inheritance, but— and here is a legal point for your consideration, Master Potts — as it seems very questionable whether titles obtained under letters patent are secure, not unreasonable fears are entertained by the holders of the lands lest they should be seized, and appropriated by the crown."

"Ah! ah! an excellent idea, master reeve," exclaimed Potts, his little eyes twinkling with pleasure. "Our gracious and sagacious monarch would grasp at the suggestion, ay, and grasp at the lands too — ha! ha! Many thanks for the hint, good reeve. I will not fail to profit by it. If their titles are uncertain, the landholders would be glad to compromise the matter with the crown, even to the value of half their estates rather than lose the whole."

"Most assuredly they would," replied the reeve, "and furthermore they would pay the lawyer well, who could manage the matter adroitly for them. This would answer your purpose better than hunting up witches, Master Potts."

"One pursuit does not interfere with the other in the slightest degree, worthy reeve," observed Potts. "I cannot consent to give up my quest of the witches. My honour is concerned in their extermination. But to turn to Pendle Forest — the greater part of it has been disafforested, I presume?"

"It has," replied the other — "and we are now in one of the purlieus."

"Pourallee is the better word, most excellent reeve," said

Potts. "I tell you thus much because you appear to be a man of learning. Manwood, our great authority in such matters, declares a pourallee to be 'a certain territory of ground adjoining unto the forest, mered and bounded with immoveable marks, meres, and boundaries, known by matter of record only.' And as it applies to the perambulation we are about to make, I may as well repeat what the same learned writer further saith touching marks, meres, and boundaries, and how they may be known. 'For, although,' he saith, 'a forest doth lie open and not inclosed with hedge, ditch, pale, or stone-wall, which some other inclosures have, yet in the eye and consideration of the law, the same hath as strong an inclosure by those marks, meres, and boundaries, as if there were a brick wall to encircle the same.' Marks, learned reeve, are deemed unremoveable — *primo*, *quia omnes metæ forestæ sunt integræ domino regi* — and those who take them away are punishable for the trespass at the assizes of the forest. *Secundo*, because the marks are things that cannot be stirred, as rivers, highways, hills, and the like. Now, such unremoveable marks, meres, and boundaries we have between the estate of my excellent client, Master Roger Nowell, and that of Mistress Nutter, so that the matter at issue will be easily decided."

A singular smile crossed the reeve's countenance, but he made no observation.

"Unless the lady can turn aside streams, remove hills, and pluck up huge trees, we shall win," pursued Potts, with a chuckle.

Again the reeve smiled, but he forebore to speak.

"You talk of marks, meres, and boundaries, Master Potts," remarked Richard. "Are not the words synonymous?"

"Not precisely so, Sir," replied the attorney; "there is a

slight difference in their signification, which I will explain to you. The words of the statute are '*metas, meras, et bundas,*'— now *meta*, or mark, is an object rising from the ground, as a church, a wall, or a tree; *mera*, or mere, is the space or interval between the forest and the land adjoining, whereupon the mark may chance to stand; and *bunda* is the boundary, lying on a level with the forest, as a river, a highway, a pool, or a bog."

"I comprehend the distinction," replied Richard. "And now as we are on this subject," he added to the reeve, "I would gladly know the precise nature of your office?"

"My duty," replied the other, "is to range daily throughout all the purlieus, or pourallees, as Master Potts more properly terms them, and disafforested lands, and inquire into all trespasses and offences against vert or venison, and present them at the king's next court of attachment or swainmote. It is also my business to drive into the forest such wild beasts as have strayed from it; to attend to the lawing and expeditation of mastiffs; and to raise hue and cry against any malefactors or trespassers within the forest."

"I will give you the exact words of the statute," said Potts — "'*Si quis viderit malefactores infra metas forestæ, debet illos capere secundum posse suum, et si non possit, debet levare hutesium et clamorem.*' And the penalty for refusing to follow hue and cry is heavy fine."

"I would that that part of your duty relating to the hock-sinewing, and lawing of mastiffs, could be discontinued," said Richard. "I grieve to see a noble animal so mutilated."

"In Bowland Forest, as you are probably aware, Sir," rejoined the reeve, "only the larger mastiffs are lamed, a small stirrup or gauge being kept by the master forester,

Squire Robert Parker of Browsholme, and the dog whose foot will pass through it escapes mutilation."

"The practice is a cruel one, and I would it were abolished with some of our other barbarous forest laws," observed Richard.

While this conversation had been going on, the party had proceeded well on their way. For some time the road, which consisted of little more than tracks of wheels along the turf, led along a plain, thrown up into heathy hillocks, and then passing through a thicket, evidently part of the old forest, it brought them to the foot of a hill, which they mounted, and descended into another valley. Here they came upon Pendle Water and while skirting its banks, could see at a great depth below the river rushing over its rocky bed like an Alpine torrent. The scenery had now begun to assume a savage and sombre character. The deep rift through which the river ran was evidently the result of some terrible convulsion of the earth, and the rocky strata were strangely and fantastically displayed. On the further side the banks rose up precipitously, consisting for the most part of bare cliffs, though now and then a tree would root itself in some crevice. Below this the stream sank over a wide shelf of rock, in a broad full cascade, and boiled and foamed in the stony basin that received it, after which, grown less impetuous, it ran tranquilly on for a couple of hundred yards, and was then artificially restrained by a dam, which diverting it in part from its course, caused it to turn the wheels of a mill. Here was the abode of the unfortunate Richard Baldwyn, and here had blossomed forth the fair flower so untimely gathered. An air of gloom hung over this once cheerful spot: its very beauty contributing to this saddening effect. The mill-race flowed swiftly and brightly on, but the wheel was stopped, windows and doors were closed, and death kept his grim

holiday undisturbed. No one was to be seen about the premises, nor was any sound heard except the bark of the lonely watch-dog. Many a sorrowing glance was cast at this forlorn habitation, as the party rode past it, and many a sigh was heaved for the poor girl who had so lately been its pride and ornament; but if any one had noticed the bitter sneer curling the reeve's lip, or caught the malignant fire gleaming in his eye, it would scarcely have been thought that he shared in the general regret.

After the cavalcade had passed the mill, one or two other cottages appeared on the near side of the river, while the opposite banks began to be clothed with timber. The glen became more and more contracted, and a stone bridge crossed the stream, near which, and on the same side of the river as the party, stood a cluster of cottages constituting the little village of Rough Lee.

On reaching the bridge, Mistress Nutter's habitation came in view, and it was pointed out by Nicholas to Potts, who contemplated it with much curiosity. In his eyes it seemed exactly adapted to its owner, and formed to hide dark and guilty deeds. It was a stern, sombre-looking mansion, built of a dark gray stone, with tall square chimneys, and windows with heavy mullions. High stone walls, hoary and moss-grown, ran round the gardens and courts, except on the side of the river, where there was a terrace overlooking the stream, and forming a pleasant summer's walk. At the back of the house were a few ancient oaks and sycamores, and in the gardens were some old clipped yews.

Part of this ancient mansion is still standing, and retains much of its original character, though subdivided and tenanted by several humble families. The garden is cut up into paddocks, and the approach environed by a labyrinth of low stone walls while miserable sheds and other buildings are

appended to it; the terrace is wholly obliterated; and the grange and offices are pulled down, but sufficient is still left of the place to give an idea of its pristine appearance and character. Its situation is striking and peculiar. In front rises a high hill, forming the last link of the chain of Pendle, and looking upon Barrowford and Colne, on the further side of which, and therefore not discernible from the mansion, stood Malkin Tower. At the period in question the lower part of this hill was well wooded, and washed by the Pendle Water, which swept past it through banks picturesque and beautiful, though not so bold and rocky as those in the neighbourhood of the mill. In the rear of the house the ground gradually rose for more than a quarter of a mile, when it obtained a considerable elevation. Following the course of the stream, and looking down the gorge, another hill appeared, so that the house was completely shut in by mountainous acclivities. In winter, when the snow lay on the heights, or when the mists hung upon them for weeks together, or descended in continuous rain, Rough Lee was sufficiently desolate, and seemed cut off from all communication with the outer world, but at the season when the party beheld it, though the approaches were rugged and difficult, and almost inaccessible except to the horseman or pedestrian, bidding defiance to any vehicle except of the strongest construction, still the place was not without a certain charm, mainly, however, derived from its seclusion. The scenery was stern and sombre, the hills were dark and dreary, but the very wildness of the place was attractive, and the old house, with its gray walls, its lofty chimneys, its gardens with their clipped yews, and its rook-haunted trees, harmonised well with all around it.

As the party drew near the house, the gates were thrown open by an old porter with two other servants, who besought

them to stay and partake of some refreshment, but Roger Nowell haughtily and peremptorily declined the invitation, and rode on, and the others, though some of them would fain have complied, followed him.

Scarcely were they gone, than James Device, who had been in the garden, issued from the gate, and speeded after them.

Passing through a close at the back of the mansion, and tracking a short narrow lane, edged by stone walls, the party, which had received some accessions from the cottages of Rough Lee, as well as from the huts on the hill side, again approached the river, and proceeded along its banks.

The new comers being all of them tenants of Mistress Nutter, and acting apparently under the directions of James Device, who had now joined the troop, stoutly and loudly maintained that the lady would be found right in the inquiry with the exception of one old man, named Henry Mitton; and he shook his head gravely when appealed to by Jem, and could by no efforts be induced to join him in the clamour.

Notwithstanding this demonstration, Roger Nowell and his legal adviser were both very sanguine as to the result of the survey being in their favour, and Master Potts, turned to ascertain from Sparshot, that the two plans, which had been rolled up and consigned to his custody, were quite safe.

Meanwhile, the party having followed the course of Pendle Water through the glen for about half a mile, during which they kept close to the brawling current, entered a little thicket, and then striking off on the left, passed over the foot of a hill, and came to the edge of a wide moor, where a halt was called by Nowell.

It being now announced that they were on the confines of the disputed property, preparations were immediately made

for the survey; the plans were taken out of a quiver, in which they had been carefully deposited by Sparshot, and handed to Potts, who giving one to Roger Nowell and the other to Nicholas, and opening his memorandum-book, declared that all was ready, and the two leaders rode slowly forward, while the rest of the troop followed, their curiosity being stimulated to the highest pitch.

Presently Roger Nowell again stopped, and pointed to a woody brake.

"We are now come," he said, "to a wood forming part of my property, and which, from an eruption caused by a spring that took place in it, many years ago, is called Burst Clough."

"Exactly, Sir — exactly," cried Potts; "Burst Clough — I have it here — landmarks, five gray stones, lying apart at a distance of one hundred yards or thereabouts, and giving you, Sir, twenty acres of moor land. Is it not so, Master Nicholas? The marks are such as I have described, eh?"

"They are, Sir," replied the squire; "with this slight difference in the allotment of the land — namely, that Mistress Nutter claims the twenty acres, while she assigns you only ten."

"Ten devils!" cried Roger Nowell, furiously. "Twenty acres are mine, and I will have them."

"To the proof, then," rejoined Nicholas. "The first of the gray stones is here."

"And the second on the left, in that hollow," said Roger Nowell. "Come on, my masters, come on."

"Ay, come on!" cried Nicholas; "this perambulation will be rare sport. Who wins, for a piece of gold, cousin Richard?"

"Nay, I will place no wager on the event," replied the young man.

"Well, as you please," cried the squire, "but I would lay five to one that Mistress Nutter beats the magistrate."

Meanwhile, the whole troop having set forward, they soon arrived at the second stone. Gray and moss-grown, it was deeply embedded in the soil, and to all appearance had rested undisturbed for many a year.

"You measure from the clough, I presume, Sir?" remarked Potts to Nowell.

"To be sure," replied the magistrate, "but how is this? — This stone seems to me much nearer the clough than it used to be."

"Yeigh, so it dun, mester," observed old Mitton.

"It does not appear to have been disturbed, at all events," said Nicholas, dismounting and examining it.

"It would seem not," said Nowell — "and yet it certainly is not in its old place."

"Yo are mistaen, mester," observed Jem Device, "ey knoa th'lond weel, an this stoan has stood where it does fo' t' last twenty year. Ha'n't it, neeburs?"

"Yeigh — yeigh," responded several voices.

"Well, let us go on to the next stone," said Potts, looking rather blank.

Accordingly, they went forward, the hinds exchanging significant looks, and Roger Nowell and Nicholas carefully examining their respective maps.

"These land-marks exactly tally with my plan," said the squire, as they arrived at the third stone.

"But not with mine," said Nowell, "this stone ought to be two hundred yards to the right. Some trickery has been practised."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the squire, "these ponderous masses could never have been moved. Besides, there are several persons here who know every inch of the ground, and

will give you their unbiassed testimony. What say you, my men? Are these the old boundary stones?"

All answered in the affirmative, except old Mitton, who still raised a dissenting voice.

"They be th' owd boundary marks, sure enough," he said, "boh they are neaw i' their owd places."

"It is quite clear that the twenty acres belong to Mistress Nutter," observed Nicholas, "and that you must content yourself with ten, Master Nowell." "Make an entry to that effect, Master Potts, unless you will have the ground measured."

"No, it is needless," replied the magistrate, sharply, "let us go on."

During this survey, some of the features of the country appeared changed to the rustics, but how or in what way they could not precisely tell, and they were easily induced by James Device to give their testimony in Mistress Nutter's favour.

A small rivulet was now reached, and another halt being called upon its sedgy banks, the plans were again consulted.

"What have we here, Master Potts — marks or boundaries?" inquired Richard, with a smile.

"Both," replied Potts, angrily. "This rivulet, which I take to be Moss Brook, is a boundary, and that sheepfold and the two posts standing in a line with it are marks. But hold! how is this?" he cried, regarding the plan in dismay, "the five acres of waste land should be on the left of the brook."

"It would doubtless suit Master Nowell better if it were so," said Nicholas, "but as they chance to be on the right, they belong to Mistress Nutter. I merely speak from the plan."

"Your plan is naught, Sir," cried Nowell, furiously, "by what foul practice these changes have been wrought I pretend not to say, though I can give a good guess, but the audacious witch who has thus deluded me shall bitterly rue it."

"Hold, hold, Master Nowell," rejoined Nicholas, "I can make great allowance for your anger, which is natural considering your disappointment, but I will not permit such unwarrantable insinuations to be thrown out against Mistress Nutter. You agreed to abide by Sir Ralph Assheton's award, and you must not complain if it be made against you. Do you imagine that this stream can have changed its course in a single night; or that yon sheepfold has been removed to the further side of it?"

"I do," replied Nowell.

"And so do I," cried Potts; "it has been accomplished by the aid of —"

But feeling himself checked by a glance from the reeve, he stammered out, "of — of Mother Demdike."

"You declared just now that marks, meres, and boundaries, were unremoveable, Master Potts," said the reeve, with a sneer; "you have altered your opinion."

The crest-fallen attorney was dumb.

"Master Roger Nowell must find some better plea than the imputation of witchcraft to set aside Mistress Nutter's claim," observed Richard.

"Yeigh, that he mun," cried James Device, and the hinds who supported him.

The magistrate bit his lips with vexation.

"There is witchcraft in it, I repeat," he said.

"Yeigh, that there be," responded old Mitton.

But the words were scarcely uttered, when he was felled to the ground by the bludgeon of James Device.

"Ey'd sarve thee i' t' same way, fo' two pins," said Jem, regarding Potts with a savage look.

"No violence, Jem," cried Nicholas, authoritatively — "you do harm to the cause you would serve by your outrageous conduct."

"Beg pardon, squoire," replied Jem, "boh ey winna hear lies towd abowt Mistress Nutter."

"No one shan speak ill on her here," cried the hinds.

"Well, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, "are you willing to concede the matter at once, or will you pursue the investigation further?"

"I will ascertain the extent of the mischief done to me before I stop," rejoined the magistrate, angrily.

"Forward, then," cried Nicholas. "Our course now lies along this footpath, with a croft on the left, and an old barn on the right. Here the plans correspond, I believe, Master Potts?"

The attorney yielded a reluctant assent.

"There is next a small spring and trough on the right, and we then come to a limestone quarry — then by a plantation called Cat Gallows Wood — so named because some troublesome mouser has been hanged there, I suppose, and next by a deep moss-pit, called Swallow Hole. All right, eh, Master Potts! We shall now enter upon Worston Moor, and come to the hut occupied by Jem Device, who can, it is presumed, speak positively as to its situation."

"Very true," cried Potts, as if struck by an idea. "Let the rascal step forward. I wish to put a few questions to him respecting his tenement. I think I shall catch him now," he added, in a low tone, to Nowell.

"Here ey be," cried Jem, stepping up with an insolent and defying look. "Whot d'ye want wi' me?"

"First of all I would caution you to speak the truth," commenced Potts, impressively, "as I shall take down your answers in my memorandum-book, and they will be produced against you hereafter."

"If he utters a falsehood I will commit him," said Roger Nowell, sharply.

"Speak ceevilly, an ey win gi' yo a ceevil answer," rejoined Jem, in a surly tone; "boh ey'm nah to be browbeaten."

"First, then, is your hut in sight?" asked Potts.

"Neaw," replied Jem.

"But you can point out its situation, I suppose?" pursued the attorney.

"Sartinly, ey con," replied Jem, without heeding a significant glance cast at him by the reeve. "It stonds behint yon kloof, ot soide o' t' moor, wi' a rindle in front."

"Now mind what you say, sirrah," cried Potts. "You are quite sure the hut is behind the clough; and the rindle, which, being interpreted from your base vernacular, I believe means a gutter, in front of it?"

The reeve coughed slightly, but failed to attract Jem's attention, who replied quickly, that he was quite sure of the circumstances.

"Very well," said Potts—"you have all heard the answer. He is quite sure as to what he states. Now then, I suppose you can tell whether the hut looks to the north or the south; whether the door opens to the moor or to the clough; and whether there is a path leading from it to a spot called Hook Cliff?"

At this moment Jem caught the eye of the reeve, and the look given him by the latter completely puzzled him.

"Ey dunna reetly recollect which way it looks," he answered.

"What! you prevaricating rascal, do you pretend to say that you do not know which way your own dwelling stands," thundered Roger Nowell. "Speak out, sirrah, or Sparshot shall take you into custody at once."

"Ey'm ready, your worship," replied the beadle.

"Weel, then," said Jem, imperfectly comprehending the

signs made to him by the reeve, "the hut looks nather to t' south naw to t' north, but to t' west; it feaces t' moor; an there is a path fro' it to Hook Cliff."

As he finished speaking, he saw from the reeve's angry gestures that he had made a mistake, but it was now too late to recall his words. However, he determined to make an effort.

"Now ey bethink me, ey'm naw sure that ey'm reet," he said.

"You must be sure, sirrah," said Roger Nowell, bending his awful brows upon him. "You cannot be mistaken as to your own dwelling. Take down his description, Master Potts, and proceed with your interrogatories if you have any more to put to him."

"I wish to ask him whether he has been at home to-day," said Potts.

"Answer, fellow," thundered the magistrate.

Before replying, Jem would fain have consulted the reeve, but the latter had turned away in displeasure. Not knowing whether a lie would serve his turn, and fearing he might be contradicted by some of the bystanders, he said he had not been at home for two days, but had returned the night before at a late hour from Whalley, and had slept at Rough Lee.

"Then you cannot tell what changes may have taken place in your dwelling, during your absence?" said Potts.

"Of course not," replied Jem, "boh ey dunna see how ony chawnges con ha' happent i' so short a time."

"But I do, if you do not, sirrah," said Potts. "Be pleased to give me your plan, Master Nowell. I have a further question to ask him," he added, after consulting it for a moment.

"Ey win awnser nowt more," replied Jem, gruffly.

"You will answer whatever questions Master Potts may

put to you, or you are taken into custody," said the magistrate sternly.

Jem would have willingly beaten a retreat, but being surrounded by the two grooms and Sparshot, who only waited a sign from Nowell to secure him, or knock him down if he attempted to fly, he gave a surly intimation that he was ready to speak.

"You are aware that a dyke intersects the heath before us, namely, Worston Moor?" said Potts.

Jem nodded his head.

"I must request particular attention to your plan as I proceed, Master Nicholas," pursued the attorney. "I now wish to be informed by you, James Device, whether that dyke cuts through the middle of the moor, or traverses the side; and if so, which side? I desire also to be informed where it commences, and where it ends?"

Jem scratched his head, and reflected a moment.

"The matter does not require consideration, sirrah," cried Nowell, "I must have an instant answer."

"So yo shan," replied Jem; "weel, then, th' dyke begins near a little mound ca'd Turn Heaod, about a hundert yards fro' my dwellin', an' runs across th' easterly soide o't moor till it reaches Knowl Bottom."

"You will swear this?" cried Potts, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction.

"Swere it! eigh," replied Jem.

"Eigh, we'n aw swere it," chorussed the hinds.

"I 'm delighted to hear it," cried Potts, radiant with delight, "for your description corresponds exactly with Master Nowell's plan, and differs materially from that of Mistress Nutter, as Squire Nicholas Assheton will tell you."

"I cannot deny it," replied Nicholas, in some confusion.

"Ey should ha' said 'westerly' i'stead o' 'yeasterly,'"

cried Jem, "boh yo puzzle a mon so wi' your lawyerly questins, that he dusna knoa his reet hond fro' his laft."

"Yeigh, yeigh, we aw meant to say 'yeasterly,'" added the hinds.

"You have sworn the contrary," cried Nowell. "Secure him," he added to the grooms and Sparshot, "and do not let him go till we have completed the survey. We will now see how far the reality corresponds with the description, and what further devilish tricks have been played with the property."

Upon this, the troop was again put in motion, James Device walking between the two grooms, with Sparshot behind him.

So wonderfully elated was Master Potts by the successful hit he had just made, and which, in his opinion, quite counterbalanced his previous failure, that he could not help communicating his satisfaction to Flint, and this in such manner, that the fiery little animal, who had been for some time exceedingly tractable and good-natured, took umbrage at it, and threatened to dislodge him, if he did not desist from his vagaries — delivering the hint so clearly and unmistakeably that it was not lost upon his rider, who endeavoured to calm him down. In proportion as the attorney's spirits rose, those of James Device and his followers sank, for they felt they were caught in a snare, from which they could not easily escape.

By this time they had reached the borders of Worston Moor, which had been hitherto concealed by a piece of rising ground, covered with gorse and brush-wood, and Jem's hut, together with the clough, the rindle, and the dyke, came distinctly into view. The plans were again produced, and, on comparing them, it appeared that the various land-marks were precisely situated as laid down by Mistress Nutter, while their disposition was entirely at variance with James Device's statement.

Master Potts then rose in his stirrups, and calling for silence, addressed the assemblage.

"There stands the hut," he said, "and instead of being behind the clough, it is on one side of it, while the door certainly does *not* face the moor, neither is the rindle in front of the dwelling or near it; while the dyke, which is the main and important boundary line between the properties, runs above two hundred yards further west than formerly. Now, observe the original position of these marks, meres, and boundaries — that is, of this hut, this clough, this rindle, and this dyke — exactly corresponds with the description given of them by the man Device, who dwells in the place, and who is, therefore, a person most likely to be accurately acquainted with the country; and yet, though he has only been absent two days, changes the most surprising have taken place—changes so surprising, indeed, that he scarcely knows the way to his own house, and certainly never could find the path which he has described as leading to Hook Cliff, since it is entirely obliterated. Observe, further, all these extraordinary and incomprehensible changes in the appearance of the country, and in the situation of the marks, meres, and boundaries, are favourable to Mistress Nutter, and give her the advantage she seeks over my honoured and honourable client. They are set down in Mistress Nutter's plan, it is true; but when, let me ask, was that plan prepared? In my opinion it was prepared first, and the changes in the land made after it by diabolical fraud and contrivance. I am sorry to have to declare this to you, Master Nicholas, and to you, Master Richard, but such is my firm conviction."

"And mine, also," added Nowell; "and I here charge Mistress Nutter with sorcery and witchcraft, and on my return I will immediately issue a warrant for her arrest. Sparshot,

I command you to attach the person of James Device, for aiding and abetting her in her foul practices."

"I will help you to take charge of him," said the reeve, riding forward.

Probably this was done to give Jem a chance of escape, and if so, it was successful, for as the reeve pushed among his captors, and thrust Sparshot aside, the ruffian broke from them; and running with great swiftness across the moor, plunged into the clough, and disappeared.

Nicholas and Richard instantly gave chase, as did Master Potts, but the fugitive led them over the treacherous bog in such a manner as to baffle all pursuit. A second disaster here overtook the unlucky attorney, and damped him in his hour of triumph. Flint, who had apparently not forgotten or forgiven the joyous kicks he had recently received from the attorney's heels, came to a sudden halt by the side of the quagmire, and putting down his head, and flinging up his legs, cast him into it. While Potts was scrambling out, the animal galloped off in the direction of the clough, and had just reached it, when he was seized upon by James Device, who suddenly started from the covert, and vaulted upon his back.

CHAPTER VIII.

Rough Lee.

On returning from their unsuccessful pursuit of James Device, the two Asshetons found Roger Nowell haranguing the hinds, who on the flight of their leader would have taken to their heels likewise, if they had not been detained, partly by the energetic efforts of Sparshot and the grooms, and partly by the exhortations and menaces of the magistrate and Holden. As it was, two or three contrived to get away, and fled across the moor, whither the reeve pretended to pursue them; while

those left behind were taken sharply to task by Roger Nowell.

"Listen to me," he cried, "and take good heed to what I say, for it concerns you nearly. Strange and dreadful things have come under my observation on my way hither. I have seen a whole village stricken as by a plague — a poor pedlar deprived of the use of his limbs and put in peril of his life — and a young maiden, once the pride and ornament of your own village, snatched from a fond father's care, and borne to an untimely grave. These things I have seen with my own eyes, and I am resolved that the perpetrators of these enormities, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, shall be brought to justice. As to you, the deluded victims of the impious hags, I can easily understand why you shut your eyes to their evil doings. Terrified by their threats you submit to their exactions, and so become their slaves — slaves of the bond-slaves of Satan. What miserable servitude is this! By so doing you not only endanger the welfare of your souls, by leaguing with the enemies of Heaven, and render yourselves unworthy to be classed with a religious and Christian people, but you place your lives in jeopardy by becoming accessories to the crimes of those great offenders, and render yourselves liable to like punishment with them. Seeing, then, the imminency of the peril in which you stand, you will do well to avoid it while there is yet time. Nor is this your only risk. Your servitude to Mistress Nutter is equally perilous. What if she be owner of the land you till, and the flocks you tend! You owe her no fealty. She has forfeited all title to your service — and so far from aiding her, you ought to regard her as a great criminal, whom you are bound to bring to justice. I have now incontestable proofs of her dealing in the black art, and can show that by witchcraft she has altered the face of this country, with the intent to rob me of my land."

Holden now took up the theme. "The finger of Heaven is pointed against such robbery," he cried. "'Cursed is he,' saith the scripture, 'that removeth his neighbour's landmark.' And again, it is written, 'Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly.' Both these things hath Mistress Nutter done, and for both shall she incur divine vengeance."

"Neither shall she escape that of man," added Nowell, severely, "for our sovereign lord hath enacted that all persons employing or rewarding any evil spirit, shall be held guilty of felony, and shall suffer death. And death will be her portion, for such demoniacal agency most assuredly hath she employed."

The magistrate here paused for a moment to regard his audience, and reading in their terrified looks that his address had produced the desired impression, he continued with increased severity.

"These wicked women shall trouble the land no longer. They shall be arrested, and brought to judgment; and if you do not heartily bestir yourselves in their capture, and undertake to appear in evidence against them, you shall be held and dealt with as accessories in their crimes."

Upon this, the hinds, who were greatly alarmed, declared with one accord their willingness to act as the magistrate should direct.

"You do wisely," cried Potts, who by this time had made his way back to the assemblage, covered from head to foot with ooze as on his former misadventure. "Mistress Nutter and the two old hags who hold you in thrall would lead you to destruction. For understand it is the firm determination of my respected client, Master Roger Nowell, as well as of myself, not to relax in our exertions till the whole of these pestilent witches who trouble the country be swept away, and to spare none who assist and uphold them."

The hinds stared aghast, for so grim was the appearance of the attorney, that they almost thought Hobthurst, the lubber-fiend, was addressing them.

At this moment, old Henry Mitton came up. He had partially recovered from the stunning effects of the blow dealt him by James Device, but his head was cut open, and his white locks were dabbled in blood. Pushing his way through the assemblage, he stood before the magistrate.

"If yo want a witness agen that foul murtheress and witch, Alice Nutter, ca' me, Master Roger Nowell," he said. "Ey con tay my Bible oath that the whole feace o' this keawntry has been chaunged sin yester neet, by her hondywark. Ca' me also to speak to her former life — to her intimacy wi' Mother Demdike an owd Chattox. Ca' me to prove her constant attendance at devils' sabbaths on Pendle Hill, and elsewhere, wi' other black and damning offences — an among 'em the murder, by witchcraft, o' her husband, Ruchot Nutter."

A thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage at this denunciation, and Master Potts, who was being cleansed from his sable stains by one of the grooms, cried out,

"This is the very man for us, my excellent client. Your name and abode, friend?"

"Harry Mitton, o' Rough Lee," replied the old man. "Ey ha' dwelt there seventy year an uppards, and ha' known the feyther and granfeyther o' Ruchot Nutter, an' also Alice Nutter, when hoo war Alice Assheton. Ca' me, Sir, an' aw' ye want to knoa ye shan larn."

"We will call you, my good friend," said Potts; "and if you have sustained any private wrongs from Mistress Nutter, they shall be amply redressed."

"Ey ha' endured much ot her honts," rejoined Mitton; "boh ey dunna speak o' mysel'. It be high time that Owd

Scrat should ha' his claws clipt, an honest folk be allowed to live in peace."

"Very true, my worthy friend — very true," assented Potts.

An immediate return to Whalley was now proposed by Nowell, but Master Potts was of opinion that as they were in the neighbourhood of Malkin Tower they should proceed thither at once and effect the arrest of Mother Demdike, after which Mother Chattox could be sought out and secured. The presence of these two witches would be most important, he declared, in the examination of Mistress Nutter. Hue and cry for the fugitive James Device, ought also, to be made throughout the forest.

Confounded by what they heard, Richard and Nicholas had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings, but they now seconded Master Potts's proposition, hoping that the time occupied by the visit to Malkin Tower would prove serviceable to Mistress Nutter, for they did not doubt that intelligence would be conveyed to her by some of her agents of Nowell's intention to arrest her.

Additional encouragement was given to the plan by the arrival of Richard Baldwyn, who at this juncture rode furiously up to the party.

"Weel, han yo settled your business here, Mester Nowell?" he asked, in breathless anxiety.

"We have so far settled it, that we have established proofs of witchcraft against Mistress Nutter," replied Nowell. "Can you speak to her character, Baldwyn?"

"Yeigh, that ey con," rejoined the miller, "an nowt good. Ey wish to see aw these mischeevous witches burnt; an that 's why ey ha' ridden efter yo, Mester Nowell. Ey want your help os a magistrate agen Mother Demdike. Yo ha a constable wi' ye, and so can arrest her at wonst."

"You have come most opportunely, Baldwyn," observed Potts. "We were just considering whether we should go to Malkin Tower."

"Then decide upon 't," rejoined the miller, "or th' owd hag win escape ye. Tak her unaweares."

"I don't know that we shall take her unawares, Baldwyn," said Potts, "but I am decidedly of opinion that whe should go thither without delay. Is Malkin Tower far off?"

"About a mile fro' Rough Lee," replied the miller. "Go back wi' me to t' mill where yo con refresh yourselves, an ey'n get together some dozen o' my friends, an then we'n aw go up to t' Tower together."

"A very good suggestion," said Potts; "and no doubt Master Nowell will accede to it."

"We have force enough already it appears to me," observed Nowell.

"I should think so," replied Richard. "Some dozen men, armed, against a poor defenceless old woman are surely enough."

"Owd, boh neaw defenceless, Mester Ruchot," rejoined Baldwyn. "Yo canna go i' too great force on an expedition like this. Malkin Tower is a varry strong place, os yo'n find."

"Well," said Nowell, "since we are here, I agree with Master Potts, that it would be better to secure these two offenders, and convey them to Whalley, where their examination can be taken at the same time with that of Mistress Nutter. We therefore accept your offer of refreshment, Baldwyn, as some of our party may stand in need of it, and will at once proceed to the mill."

"Well resolved, Sir," said Potts.

"We'n tae th' owd witch, dead or alive," cried Baldwyn.

"Alive — we must have her alive, good Baldwyn," said Potts. "You must see her perish at the stake."

"Reet, mon," cried the miller, his eyes blazing with fury; "that 's true vengeance. Ey'n ride whoam an get aw ready fo ye. Yo knoa t' road."

So saying, he struck spurs into his horse and galloped off. Scarcely was he gone, than the reeve, who had kept out of his sight, came forward.

"Since you have resolved upon going to Malkin Tower," he said, to Nowell, "and have a sufficiently numerous party for the purpose, my further attendance can be dispensed with. I will ride in search of James Device."

"Do so," replied the magistrate, "and let hue and cry be made after him."

"It shall be," replied the reeve, "and if taken he shall be conveyed to Whalley."

And he made towards the clough, as if with the intention of putting his words into execution.

Word was now given to set forward, and Master Potts having been accommodated with a horse by one of the grooms, who proceeded on foot, the party began to retrace their course to the mill.

They were soon again by the side of Pendle Water, and ere long reached Rough Lee. As they rode through the close at the back of the mansion, Roger Nowell halted for a moment, and observed, with a grim smile, to Richard —

"Never more shall Mistress Nutter enter that house. Within a week she shall be lodged in Lancaster Castle, as a felon of the darkest dye, and she shall meet a felon's fate. And not only shall she be sent thither, but all her partners in guilt — Mother Demdike and her accursed brood, the Devices; old Chattox and her grand-daughter, Nance Redferne; not one shall escape."

"You do not include Alizon Device in your list?" cried Richard.

"I include all — I will spare none," rejoined Nowell, sternly.

"Then I will move no further with you," said Richard.

"How!" cried Nowell, "are you an upholder of these witches. Beware what you do, young man. Beware how you take part with them. You will bring suspicion upon yourself, and get entangled in a net from which you will not easily escape."

"I care not what may happen to me," rejoined Richard, "I will never lend myself to gross injustice — such as you are about to practise. Since you announce your intention, of including the innocent with the guilty, of exterminating a whole family for the crimes of one or two of its members, I have done. You have made dark accusations against Mistress Nutter, but you have proved nothing. You assert that, by witchcraft, she has changed the features of your land, but in what way can you make good the charge? Old Mitton has, indeed, volunteered himself as a witness against her, and has accused her of most heinous offences, but he has at the same time shown that he is her enemy, and his testimony will be regarded with doubt. I will not believe her guilty on mere suspicion, and I deny that you have aught more to proceed upon."

"I shall not argue the point with you now, Sir," replied Nowell, angrily. "Mistress Nutter will be fairly tried, and if I fail in my proofs against her, she will be acquitted. But I have little fear of such a result," he added, with a sinister smile.

"You are confident, Sir, because you know there would be every disposition to find her guilty," replied Richard. "She will not be fairly tried. All the prejudices of ignorance and superstition, heightened by the published opinions of the King, will be arrayed against her. Were she as free from

crime, or thought of crime, as the new-born babe, once charged with the horrible and inexplicable offence of witchcraft, she would scarce escape. You go determined to destroy her."

"I will not deny it," said Roger Nowell, "and I am satisfied that I shall render good service to society by freeing it from so vile a member. So abhorrent is the crime of witchcraft, that were my own son suspected, I would be the first to deliver him to justice. Like a noxious and poisonous plant, the offence has taken deep root in this country, and is spreading its baneful influence around, so that if it be not extirpated, it may spring up anew, and cause incalculable mischief. But it shall now be effectually checked. Of the families I have mentioned, not one shall escape; and if Mistress Nutter herself had a daughter, she should be brought to judgment. In such cases, children must suffer for the sins of the parents."

"You have no regard then for their innocence?" said Richard, who felt as if a weight of calamity was crushing him down.

"Their innocence must be proved at the proper tribunal," rejoined Nowell. "It is not for me to judge them."

"But you do judge them," cried Richard, sharply. "In making the charge you know that you pronounce the sentence of condemnation as well. This is why the humane man — why the just man would hesitate to bring an accusation — even where he suspected guilt — but where suspicion could not possibly attach, he would never suffer himself, however urged on by feelings of animosity, to injure the innocent."

"You ascribe most unworthy motives to me, young Sir," rejoined Nowell, sternly. "I am influenced only by a desire to see justice administered, and I shall not swerve from my duty, because my humanity may be called in question by a love-sick boy. I understand why you plead thus warmly for

these infamous persons. You are enthralled by the beauty of the young witch, Alizon Device. I noted how you were struck by her yesterday — and I heard what Sir Thomas Metcalfe said on the subject. But take heed what you do. You may jeopardise both soul and body in the indulgence of this fatal passion. Witchcraft is exercised in many ways. Its professors have not only power to maim and to kill, and to do other active mischief, but to ensnare the affections, and endanger the souls of their victims by enticing them to unhallowed love. Alizon Device is comely to view, no doubt, but who shall say whence her beauty is derived. Hell may have arrayed her in its fatal charms. Sin is beautiful, but all-destructive. And the time will come when you may thank me for delivering you from the snares of this seductive syren."

Richard uttered an angry exclamation.

"Not now — I do not expect it — you are too much besotted by her," pursued Nowell; "but I conjure you to cast off this wicked and senseless passion, which, unless checked, will lead you to perdition. You have heard what abominable rites are practised at those unholy meetings, called Devil's Sabbaths, and how can you say that some demon may not be your rival in Alizon's love?"

"You pass all licence, Sir," cried Richard, infuriated past endurance, "and if you do not instantly retract the infamous accusation you have made, neither your age nor your office shall protect you."

"I can, fortunately, protect myself, young man," replied Nowell, coldly; "and if aught were wanting to confirm my suspicions that you were under some evil influence, it would be supplied by your present conduct. You are bewitched by this girl."

"It is false!" cried Richard.

And he raised his hand against the magistrate, when Nicholas quickly interposed.

"Nay, cousin Dick," cried the squire, "this must not be. You must take other means of defending the poor girl, whose innocence I will maintain as stoutly as yourself. But, since Master Roger Nowell is resolved to proceed to extremities, I shall likewise take leave to retire."

"Your pardon, Sir," rejoined Nowell, "you will not withdraw till I think fit. Master Richard Assheton, forgetful alike of the respect due to age and constituted authority, has ventured to raise his hand against me, for which, if I chose, I could place him in immediate arrest. But I have no such intention. On the contrary, I am willing to overlook the insult, attributing it to the frenzy by which he is possessed. But both he and you, Master Nicholas, are mistaken if you suppose I will permit you to retire. As a magistrate, in the exercise of my office, I call upon you both to aid me in the capture of the two notorious witches, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, and not to desist or depart from me till such capture be effected. You know the penalty of refusal."

"Heavy fine or imprisonment, at the option of the magistrate," remarked Potts.

"My cousin Nicholas will do as he pleases," observed Richard; "but, for my part, I will not stir a step further."

"Nor will I," added Nicholas, "unless I have Master Nowell's solemn pledge that he will take no proceedings against Alizon Device."

"You can give no such assurance, Sir," whispered Potts, seeing that the magistrate wavered in his resolution.

"You must go, then," said Nowell, "and take the consequences of your refusal to act with me. Your relationship to Mistress Nutter will not tell in your favour."

"I understand the implied threat," said Nicholas, "and

laugh at it. Richard, lad, I am with you. Let him catch the witches himself, if he can. I will not budge an inch further with him."

"Farewell, then, gentlemen," replied Roger Nowell, "I am sorry to part company with you thus, but when next we meet —" and he paused.

"We meet as enemies, I presume," supplied Nicholas.

"We meet no longer as friends," rejoined the magistrate, coldly.

With this, he moved forward, with the rest of the troop, while the two Asshetons after a moment's consultation, passed through a gate and made their way to the back of the mansion, where they found one or two men on the look-out, from whom they received intelligence, which induced them immediately to spring from their horses and hurry into the house.

Arrived at the principal entrance of the mansion, which was formed by large gates of open iron-work, admitting a view of the garden and front of the house, Roger Nowell again called a halt, and Master Potts, at his request, addressed the porter and two other serving-men who were standing in the garden in this fashion, —

"Pay attention to what I say to you, my men," he cried in a loud and authoritative voice — "a warrant will this day be issued for the arrest of Alice Nutter, of Rough Lee, in whose service you have hitherto dwelt, and who is charged with the dreadful crime of witchcraft, and with invoking, consulting, covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding, and rewarding evil spirits, contrary to the laws of God and man, and in express violation of his Majesty's statute. Now take notice, that if the said Alice Nutter shall at any time hereafter return to this her former abode, or take refuge within it, you are hereby bound to deliver her up forthwith to the nearest constable, to be by him brought before the worshipful Master

Roger Nowell, of Read, in this county, so that she may be examined by him on these charges. You hear what I have said?"

The men exchanged significant glances, but made no reply.

Potts was about to address them, but to his surprise he saw the central door of the house thrown open, and Mistress Nutter issue from it. She marched slowly and majestically down the broad gravel walk towards the gate. The attorney could scarcely believe his eyes, and he exclaimed to the magistrate, with a chuckle—

"Who would have thought of this! We have her safe enough now. Ha! ha!"

But no corresponding smile played upon Nowell's hard lips. His gaze was fixed inquiringly upon the lady.

Another surprise. From the same door issued Alizon Device, escorted by Nicholas and Richard Assheton, who walked on either side of her, and the three followed Mistress Nutter slowly down the broad walk. Such a display seemed to argue no want of confidence. Alizon did not look towards the group outside the gates, but seemed listening eagerly to what Richard was saying to her.

"Soh, Master Nowell," cried Mistress Nutter, boldly, "since you find yourself defeated in the claims you have made against my property, you are seeking to revenge yourself, I understand, by bringing charges against me, as false as they are calumnious. But I defy your malice, and can defend myself against your violence."

"If I could be astonished at any thing in you, Madam, I should be at your audacity," rejoined Nowell, "but I am glad that you have presented yourself before me; for it was my fixed intention, on my return to Whalley, to cause your arrest, and your unexpected appearance here enables me to

put my design into execution somewhat sooner than I anticipated."

Mistress Nutter laughed scornfully.

"Sparshot," vociferated Nowell, "enter those gates, and arrest the lady in the King's name."

The beadle looked irresolute. He did not like the task.

"The gates are fastened," cried Mistress Nutter.

"Force them open, then," roared Nowell, dismounting and shaking them furiously. "Bring me a heavy stone. By heaven! I will not be baulked of my prey."

"My servants are armed," cried Mistress Nutter, "and the first man who enters shall pay the penalty of his rashness with life. Bring me a petronel, Blackadder."

The order was promptly obeyed by the ill-favoured attendant, who was stationed near the gate.

"I am in earnest," said Mistress Nutter, arming the petronel, "and seldom miss my mark."

"Give attention to me, my men," cried Roger Nowell. "I charge you in the King's name to throw open the gate."

"And I charge you in mine to keep it fast," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "We shall see who will be obeyed."

One of the grooms now advanced with a large stone taken from an adjoining wall, which he threw with great force against the gates, but though it shook them violently, the fastenings continued firm. Blackadder and the two other serving-men, all of whom were armed with halberts, now advanced to the gates, and thrusting the points of their weapons through the bars, drove back those who were near them.

A short consultation now took place between Nowell and Potts, after which the latter, taking care to keep out of the reach of the halberts, thus delivered himself in a loud voice:—

"Alice Nutter, in order to avoid the serious consequences, which might ensue were the necessary measures taken to

effect a forcible entrance into your habitation, the worshipful Master Nowell has thought fit to grant you an hour's respite for reflection; at the expiration of which time he trusts that you, seeing the futility of resisting the law, will quietly yield yourself a prisoner. Otherwise, no further leniency will be shown you and those who may uphold you in your contumacy."

Mistress Nutter laughed loudly and contemptuously.

"At the same time," pursued Potts, on a suggestion from the magistrate, "Master Roger Nowell demands that Alizon Device, daughter of Elizabeth Device, whom he beholds in your company, and who is likewise suspected of witchcraft, be likewise delivered up to him."

"Aught more?" inquired Mistress Nutter.

"Only this," replied Potts, in a taunting tone, "the worshipful magistrate would offer a friendly counsel to Master Nicholas Assheton, and Master Richard Assheton, whom, to his infinite surprise, he perceives in a hostile position before him, that they in nowise interfere with his injunctions, but, on the contrary, lend their aid in furtherance of them, otherwise he may be compelled to adopt measures towards them, which must be a source of regret to him. I have furthermore to state, on the part of his worship, that strict watch will be kept at all the approaches of your house, and that no one, on any pretence whatever, during the appointed time of respite, will be suffered to enter it, or depart from it. In an hour his worship will return."

"And in an hour he shall have my answer," replied Mistress Nutter, turning away.

CHAPTER IX.

How Rough Lee was defended by Nicholas.

WHEN skies are darkest, and storms are gathering thickest overhead, the star of love will oft shine out with greatest brilliancy; and so, while Mistress Nutter was hurling defiance against her foes at the gate, and laughing their menaces to scorn — while those very foes were threatening Alizon's liberty and life — she had become wholly insensible to the peril environing her, and almost unconscious of any other presence save that of Richard, now her avowed lover — for, impelled by the irresistible violence of his feelings, the young man had chosen that moment, apparently so unpropitious, and so fraught with danger and alarm, for the declaration of his passion, and the offer of his life in her service. A few low-murmured words were all Alizon could utter in reply, but they were enough. They told Richard his passion was requited, and his devotion fully appreciated. Sweet were those moments to both — sweet, though sad. Like Alizon, her lover had become insensible to all around him. Engrossed by one thought and one object, he was lost to aught else, and was only at last aroused to what was passing by the squire, who, having good-naturedly removed to a little distance from the pair, now gave utterance to a low whistle, to let them know that Mistress Nutter was coming towards them. The lady, however, did not stop, but motioning them to follow, entered the house.

"You have heard what has passed," she said. "In an hour Master Nowell threatens to return and arrest me and Alizon."

"That shall never be," cried Richard, with a passionate look at the young girl. "We will defend you with our lives."

"Much may be done in an hour," observed Nicholas to Mistress Nutter, "and my advice to you is to use the time allowed you in making good your retreat, so that when the hawks come back, they may find the doves flown."

"I have no intention of quitting my dove-cot," replied Mistress Nutter, with a bitter smile.

"Unless you are forcibly taken from it, I suppose," said the squire; "a contingency not impossible if you await Roger Nowell's return. This time, be assured, he will not go away empty handed."

"He may not go away at all," rejoined Mistress Nutter, sternly.

"Then you mean to make a determined resistance?" said Nicholas. "Recollect that you are resisting the law. I wish I could induce you to resort to the safer expedient of flight. This affair is already dark and perplexed enough, and does not require further complication. Find any place of concealment, no matter where, till some arrangement can be made with Roger Nowell."

"I should rather urge you to fly, Nicholas," rejoined the lady, "for it is evident you have strong misgivings as to the justice of my cause, and would not willingly compromise yourself. I will not surrender to this magistrate, because, by so doing, my life would assuredly be forfeited, for my innocence could never be established before the iniquitous and bloody tribunal to which I should be brought. Neither, for the same reason, will I surrender Alizon, who, with a refinement of malignity, has been similarly accused. I shall now proceed to make preparations for my defence. Go, if you think fitting — or stay — but if you *do* stay, I shall calculate upon your active services."

"You may," replied the squire. "Whatever I may think, I admire your spirit, and will stand by you. But time is

passing, and the foe will return and find us engaged in deliberation when we ought to be prepared. You have a dozen men on the premises on whom you can rely. Half of these must be placed at the back of the house, to prevent any entrance from being effected in that quarter. The rest can remain within the entrance-hall, and be ready to rush forth when summoned by us, but we will not so summon them unless we are hardly put to it, and their aid is indispensable. All should be well armed, but I trust they will not have to use their weapons. Are you agreed to this, Madam?"

"I am," replied Mistress Nutter, "and I will give instant directions that your wishes are complied with. All approaches to the back of the house shall be strictly guarded as you direct, and my trusty man, Blackadder, on whose fidelity and courage I can entirely rely, shall take the command of the party in the hall, and act under your orders. Your prowess will not be unobserved, for Alizon and I shall be in the upper room commanding the garden, whence we can see all that takes place."

A slight smile was exchanged between the lovers, but it was evident from the anxious looks, that Alizon did not share in Richard's confidence. An opportunity, however, was presently afforded him of again endeavouring to re-assure her, for Mistress Nutter went forth to give Blackadder his orders, and Nicholas betook himself to the back of the house to ascertain, from personal inspection, its chance of security.

"You are still uneasy, dear Alizon," said Richard, taking her hand; "but do not be cast down. No harm shall befal you."

"It is not for myself I am apprehensive," she replied, "but for you, who are about to expose yourself to needless risk in this encounter; and if any thing should happen to you, I shall be for ever wretched. I would far rather you left me to my fate."

"And can you think I would allow you to be borne away a captive to ignominy and certain destruction?" cried Richard. "No, I will shed my heart's best blood before such a calamity shall occur."

"Alas!" said Alizon, "I have no means of requiting your devotion. All I can offer you in return is my love, and that I fear will prove fatal to you."

"Oh! do not say so," cried Richard. "Why should this sad presentiment still haunt you? I strove to chase it away just now, and hoped I had succeeded. You are dearer to me than life. Why, therefore, should I not risk it in your defence? And why should your love prove fatal to me?"

"I know not," replied Alizon, in a tone of deepest anguish, "but I feel as if my destiny were evil; and that, against my will, I shall drag those I most love on earth into the same dark gulf with myself. I have the greatest affection for your sister Dorothy, and yet I have been the unconscious instrument of injury to her. And you, too, Richard, who are yet dearer to me, are now put in peril on my account. I fear too, when you know my whole history, you will think of me as a thing of evil, and shun me."

"What mean you, Alizon?" he cried.

"Richard, I can have no secrets from you," she replied; "and though I was forbidden to tell you what I am now about to disclose, I will not withhold it. I was born in this house, and am daughter of its mistress."

"You tell me only what I guessed, Alizon," rejoined the young man; "but I see nothing in this why I should shun you."

Alizon hid her face for a moment in her hands; and then looking up, said wildly and hurriedly, "Would I had never known the secret of my birth; or, knowing it, had never seen what I beheld last night!"

"What did you behold?" asked Richard, greatly agitated.

"Enough to convince me, that in gaining a mother I was lost myself," replied Alizon; "for oh! how can I survive the shock of telling you, I am bound by ties than can never be dissevered to one abandoned alike of God and man — who has devoted herself to the Fiend! Pity me, Richard — pity me, and shun me!"

There was a moment's dreadful pause, which the young man was unable to break.

"Was I not right in saying my love would be fatal to you?" continued Alizon. "Fly from me while you can, Richard. Fly from this house, or you are lost for ever!"

"Never, never! I will not stir without you," cried Richard. "Come with me, and escape all the dangers by which you are menaced, and leave your sinning parent to the doom she so richly merits."

"No, no; sinful though she be, she is still my mother. I cannot leave her," cried Alizon.

"If you stay, I stay, be the consequences what they may," replied the young man; "but you have rendered my arm powerless by what you have told me. How can I defend one whom I know to be guilty?"

"Therefore I urge you to fly," she rejoined.

"I can reconcile myself to it thus," said Richard — "in defending you, whom I know to be innocent, I cannot avoid defending her. The plea is not a good one, but it will suffice to allay my scruples of conscience."

At this moment Mistress Nutter entered the hall, followed by Blackadder, and three other men, armed with calivers.

"All is ready, Richard," she said, "and it wants but a few minutes of the appointed time. Perhaps you shrink from the task you have undertaken?" she added, regarding him

sharply; "if so, say so at once, and I will adopt my own line of defence."

"Nay, I shall be ready to go forth in a moment," rejoined the young man, glancing at Alizon. "Where is Nicholas?

"Here," replied the squire, clapping him on the shoulder "All is secure at the back of the house, and the horses are coming round. We must mount at once."

Richard arose without a word.

"Blackadder will attend to your orders," said Mistress Nutter; "he only waits a sign from you to issue forth with his three companions, or to fire through the windows upon the aggressors, if you see occasion for it."

"I trust it will not come to such a pass," rejoined the squire; "a few blows from these weapons will convince them we are in earnest, and will, I hope, save further trouble."

And as he spoke he took down a couple of stout staves, and gave one of them to Richard.

"Farewell then, *preux chevaliers*," cried Mistress Nutter, with affected gaiety; "demean yourselves valiantly, and remember that bright eyes will be upon you. Now, Alizon, to our chamber."

Richard did not hazard a look at the young girl as she quitted the hall with her mother, but followed the squire mechanically into the garden, where they found the horses. Scarcely were they mounted than a loud hubbub, arising from the little village, proclaimed that their opponents had arrived, and presently after a large company of horse and foot appeared at the gate.

At sight of the large force brought against them the countenance of the squire lost its confident and jovial expression. He counted nearly forty men, each of whom was armed in some way or other, and began to fear the affair would terminate awkwardly, and entail unpleasant conse-

quences upon himself and his cousin. He was, therefore, by no means at his ease. As to Richard, he did not dare to ask himself how things would end, neither did he know how to act. His mind was in utter confusion, and his breast oppressed as if by a nightmare. He cast one look towards the upper window, and beheld at it the white face of Mistress Nutter, intently gazing at what was going forward, but Alizon was not to be seen.

Within the last half hour the sky had darkened, and a heavy cloud hung over the house, threatening a storm. Richard hoped it would come on fiercely and fast.

Meanwhile, Roger Nowell had dismounted and advanced to the gate.

"Gentlemen," he cried, addressing the two Asshetons; "I expected to find free access given to me and my followers, but as these gates are still barred against me, I call upon you, as loyal subjects of the King, not to resist or impede the course of law, but to throw them instantly open."

"You must unbar them yourself, Master Nowell," replied Nicholas. "We shall give you no help."

"Nor offer any opposition, I hope, Sir?" said the magistrate, sternly.

"You are twenty to one or thereabout," returned the squire, with a laugh; "we shall stand a poor chance with you."

"But other defensive and offensive preparations have been made, I doubt not," said Nowell, "nay, I descry some armed men through the windows of the hall. Before coming to extremities, I will make a last appeal to you and your kinsman. I have granted Mrs. Nutter and the girl with her an hour's delay, in the hope that, seeing the futility of resistance, they would quietly surrender. But I find my clemency thrown away, and undue advantage taken of the time allowed for

respite. Therefore, I shall show them no further consideration. But to you, my friends, I would offer a last warning. Forget not that you are acting in direct opposition to the law; that we are here armed with full authority and power to carry out our intentions; and that all opposition on your part will be fruitless, and will be visited upon you hereafter with severe pains and penalties. Forget not, also, that your characters will be irrecoverably damaged from your connexion with parties charged with the heinous offence of witchcraft. Meddle not, therefore, in the matter, but go your ways, or if you would act as best becomes you, aid me in the arrest of the offenders."

"Master Roger Nowell," replied Nicholas, walking his horse slowly towards the gate, "as you have given me a caution, I will give you one in return; and that is to put a bridle on your tongue, when you address gentlemen, or, by my fay, you are likely to get answers little to your taste. You have said that our characters are likely to suffer in this transaction, but in my humble opinion they will not suffer so much as your own. The magistrate who uses the arm of the law for purposes of private vengeance, and who brings a false and foul charge against his enemy, knowing that it cannot be repelled, is not entitled to any particular respect or honour. Thus have you acted towards Mistress Nutter. Defeated by her in the boundary question, without leaving its decision to those to whom you had referred it, you instantly accuse her of witchcraft, and seek to destroy her, as well as an innocent and unoffending girl by whom she is attended. Is such conduct worthy of you, or likely to redound to your credit? I think not. But this is not all. Aided by your crafty and unscrupulous ally, Master Potts, you get together a number of Mistress Nutter's tenants, and by threats and misrepresentations, induce them to become instruments of your vengeance. But

when these misguided men come to know the truth of the case — when they learn that you have no proofs whatever against Mistress Nutter, and that you are influenced solely by animosity to her, they are quite as likely to desert you as to stand by you. At all events, we are determined to resist this unjust arrest, and, at the hazard of our lives, to oppose your entrance into the house."

Nowell and Potts were greatly exasperated by this speech, but they were little prepared for its consequences. Many of those who had been induced to accompany them, as has been shown, wavered in their resolution of acting against Mistress Nutter, but they now began to declare in her favour. In vain Potts repeated all his former arguments. They were no longer of any avail. Of the troop assembled at the gate more than half marched off, and shaped their course towards the rear of the house — with what intention it was easy to surmise — while of those who remained it was very doubtful whether the whole of them would act.

The result of his oration was quite as surprising to Nicholas as to his opponents, and enchanted by the effect of his eloquence, he could not help glancing up at the window, where he perceived Mistress Nutter, whose smiles showed that she was equally well pleased.

Seeing that if any further desertions took place his chances would be at an end, with a menacing gesture at the squire, Roger Nowell ordered the attack to commence immediately.

While some of his men, amongst whom were Baldwyn and old Mitton, battered against the gate with stones, another party, headed by Potts, scaled the walls, which, though of considerable height, presented no very serious obstacles in the way of active assailants. Elevated on the shoulders of Sparshot, Potts was soon on the summit of the wall, and was about

to drop into the garden, when he heard a sound that caused him to suspend his intention.

"What are you about to do, cousin Nicholas?" inquired Richard, as the word of assault was given by the magistrate.

"Let loose Mistress Nutter's staghounds upon them," replied the squire. "They are kept in leash by a varlet stationed behind yon yew-tree hedge, who only awaits my signal to let them slip; and, by my faith, it is time he had it."

As he spoke, he applied a dog-whistle to his lips, and, blowing a loud call, it was immediately answered by a savage barking, and half a dozen hounds, rough-haired, of prodigious size and power, resembling, in make, colour, and ferocity, the Irish wolfhound, bounded towards him.

"Aha!" exclaimed Nicholas, clapping his hands to encourage them: "we could have dispersed the whole rout with these assistants. Hyke, Tristam! — hyke, Hubert! Upon them! — upon them!"

It was the savage barking of the hounds that had caught the ears of the alarmed attorney, and made him desirous to scramble back again. But this was no such easy matter. Sparshot's broad shoulders were wanting to place his feet upon, and while he was bruising his knees against the roughened sides of the wall, in vain attempts to raise himself to the top of it unaided, Hubert's sharp teeth met in the calf of his leg, while those of Tristam were fixed in the skirts of his doublet, and penetrated deeply into the flesh that filled it. A terrific yell proclaimed the attorney's anguish and alarm, and he redoubled his efforts to escape. But, if before it was difficult to get up, the feat was now impossible. All he could do was to cling with desperate tenacity to the coping of the wall, for he made no doubt, if dragged down, he should be torn in pieces. Roaring lustily for help, he besought Nicholas to have compassion upon him, but the squire appeared little moved by

his distress, and laughed heartily at his yells and vociferations.

"You will not come again on a like errand, in a hurry, I fancy, Master Potts," he said.

"I will not, good Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts; "for pity's sake call off these infernal hounds. They will rend me asunder as they would a fox."

"You were a cunning fox, in good sooth, to come hither," rejoined Nicholas, in a taunting tone; "but will you go hence if I liberate you?"

"I will — indeed I will," replied Potts.

"And will no more molest Mistress Nutter?" thundered Nicholas.

"Take heed what you promise," roared Nowell from the other side of the wall.

"If you do *not* promise it, the hounds shall pull you down, and make a meal of you!" cried Nicholas.

"I do — I swear — whatever you desire!" cried the terrified attorney.

The hounds were then called off by the squire, and, nerved by fright, Potts sprang upon the wall, and tumbled over it upon the other side, alighting upon the head of his respected and singular good client, whom he brought to the ground.

Meanwhile, all those unlucky persons who had succeeded in scaling the wall were attacked by the hounds, and, unable to stand against them, were chased round the garden, to the infinite amusement of the squire. Frightened to death, and unable otherwise to escape, for the gate allowed them no means of exit, the poor wretches fled toward the terrace overlooking Pendle Water, and leaping into the stream, gained the opposite bank. There they were safe, for the hounds were not allowed to follow them further. In this way,

the garden was completely cleared of the enemy, and Nicholas and Richard were left masters of the field.

Leaning out of the window, Mistress Nutter laughingly congratulated them on their success, and as no further disposition was manifested on the part of Nowell and such of his troop that remained to renew the attack, the contest, for the present at least, was supposed to be at an end.

By this time, also, intimation had been conveyed by the deserters from Nowell's troop, who, it will be remembered, had made their way to the back of the premises, that they were anxious to offer their services to Mistress Nutter; and as soon as this was told her, she ordered them to be admitted, and descended to give them welcome. Thus things wore a promising aspect for the besieged, while the assailing party were proportionately disheartened.

Long ere this, Baldwyn and old Mitton had desisted from their attempts to break open the gate, and, indeed, rejoiced that such a barrier was interposed between them and the hounds, whose furious onslaughts they witnessed. A bolt was launched against these four-footed guardians of the premises by the bearer of the cross-bow, but the man proved but an indifferent marksman, for, instead of hitting the hound, he disabled one of his companions who was battling with him. Finding things in this state, and that neither Nowell nor Potts returned to their charge, while their followers were withdrawn from before the gate, Nicholas thought he might fairly infer that a victory had been obtained. But like a prudent leader, he did not choose to expose himself till the enemy had absolutely yielded, and he therefore signed to Blackadder and his man to come forth from the hall. The order was obeyed, not only by them, but by the seceders from the hostile troop, and some thirty men issued from the principal door, and ranging themselves upon the lawn, set up a deafening and triumphant

shout, very different from that raised by the same individuals when under the command of Nowell. At the same moment Mistress Nutter and Alizon appeared at the door, and at the sight of them the shouting was renewed.

The unexpected turn in affairs had not been without its effect upon Richard and Alizon, and tended to revive the spirits of both. The immediate danger by which they were threatened had vanished, and time was given for the consideration of new plans. Richard had been firmly resolved to take no further part in the affray than should be required for the protection of Alizon, and, consequently, it was no little satisfaction to him to reflect that the victory had been accomplished without him, and by means which could not afterwards be questioned.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter had joined Nicholas, and the gates being unbarred by Blackadder, they passed through them. At a little distance stood Roger Nowell, now altogether abandoned, except by his own immediate followers, with Baldwyn and old Mitton. Poor Potts was lying on the ground, piteously bemoaning the lacerations his skin had undergone.

"Well, you have got the worst of it, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, as he and Mistress Nutter approached the discomfited magistrate, "and must own yourself fairly defeated."

"Defeated as I am, I would rather be in my place than in yours, Sir," retorted Nowell, sourly.

"You have had a wholesome lesson read you, Master Nowell," said Mistress Nutter; "but I do not come hither to taunt you. I am quite satisfied with the victory I have obtained, and am anxious to put an end to the misunderstanding between us."

"I have no misunderstanding with you, Madam," replied Nowell; "I do not quarrel with persons like you. But be

assured, though you may escape now, a day of reckoning will come."

"Your chief cause of grievance against me, I am aware," replied Mistress Nutter, calmly, "is that I have beaten you in the matter of the land. Now, I have a proposal to make to you respecting it."

"I cannot listen to it," rejoined Nowell, sternly; "I can have no dealings with a witch."

At this moment his cloak was plucked behind by Potts, who looked at him as much as to say, "Do not exasperate her. Hear what she has got to offer."

"I shall be happy to act as mediator between you, if possible," observed Nicholas, "but in that case I must request you, Master Nowell, to abstain from any offensive language."

"What is it you have to propose to me, then, Madam?" demanded the magistrate, gruffly.

"Come with me into the house, and you shall hear," replied Mistress Nutter.

Nowell was about to refuse peremptorily, when his cloak was again plucked by Potts, who whispered him to go.

"This is not a snare laid to entrap me, Madam?" he said, regarding the lady suspiciously.

"I will answer for her good faith," interposed Nicholas.

Nowell still hesitated, but the counsel of his legal adviser was enforced by a heavy shower of rain, which just then began to descend upon them.

"You can take shelter beneath my roof," said Mistress Nutter; "and before the shower is over we can settle the matter."

"And my wounds can be dressed at the same time," said Potts, with a groan, "for they pain me sorely."

"Blackadder has a sovereign balsam, which, with a patch or two of diachylon, will make all right," replied Nicholas,

unable to repress a laugh. "Here, lift him up between you," he added to the grooms, "and convey him into the house."

The orders were obeyed, and Mistress Nutter led the way through the now wide-opened gates; her slow and majestic march by no means accelerated by the drenching shower. What Roger Nowell's sensations were at following her in such a way, after his previous threats and boastings, may be easily conceived.

CHAPTER X.

Roger Nowell and his double.

The magistrate was ushered by the lady into a small chamber, opening out of the entrance-hall, which, in consequence of having only one small narrow window, with a clipped yew-tree before it, was extremely dark and gloomy. The walls were covered with sombre tapestry, and on entering, Mistress Nutter not only carefully closed the door, but drew the arras before it, so as to prevent the possibility of their conversation being heard outside. These precautions taken, she motioned the magistrate to a chair, and seated herself opposite him.

"We can now deal unreservedly with each other, Master Nowell," she said, fixing her eyes steadily upon him; "and as our discourse cannot be overheard and repeated, may use perfect freedom of speech."

"I am glad of it," replied Nowell, "because it will save circumlocution, which I dislike, and, therefore, before proceeding further, I must tell you, directly and distinctly, that if there be aught of witchcraft in what you are about to propose to me, I will have nought to do with it, and our conference may as well never begin."

"Then you really believe me to be a witch?" said the lady.

"I do," replied Nowell, unflinchingly.

"Since you believe this, you must also believe that I have absolute power over you," rejoined Mistress Nutter, "and might strike you with sickness, cripple you, or kill you if I thought fit."

"I know not that," returned Nowell. "There are limits, even to the power of evil beings; and your charms and enchantments, however strong and baneful, may be wholly inoperative against a magistrate in the discharge of his duty. If it were not so, you would scarcely think it worth while to treat with me."

"Humph!" exclaimed the lady. "Now, tell me frankly what you will do when you depart hence?"

"Ride off with the utmost speed to Whalley," replied Nowell, "and, acquainting Sir Ralph with all that has occurred, claim his assistance; and then, with all the force we can jointly muster, return hither, and finish the work I have left undone."

"You will forego this intention," said Mistress Nutter, with a bitter smile.

The magistrate shook his head.

"I am not easily turned from my purpose," he remarked.

"But you have not yet quitted Rough Lee," said the lady, "and after such an announcement I shall scarce think of parting with you."

"You dare not detain me," replied Nowell. "I have Nicholas Assheton's word for my security, and I know he will not break it. Besides, you will gain nothing by my detention. My absence will soon be discovered, and if living I shall be set free; if dead, avenged."

"That may, or may not be," replied Mistress Nutter; "and in any case I can, if I choose, wreak my vengeance

upon you. I am glad to have ascertained your intentions, for I now know how to treat with you. You shall not go hence, except on certain conditions. You have said you will proclaim me a witch, and will come back with sufficient force to accomplish my arrest. Instead of doing this, I advise you to return to Sir Ralph Assheton, and admit to him, that you find yourself in error in respect to the boundaries of the land —"

"Never," interrupted Nowell.

"I advise you to do this," pursued the lady, calmly, "and I advise you, also, on quitting this room, to retract all you have uttered to my prejudice, in the presence of Nicholas Assheton and other credible witnesses; in which case I will not only lay aside all feelings of animosity towards you, but will make over to you the whole of the land under dispute, and that without purchase-money on your part."

Roger Nowell was of an avaricious nature, and caught at the bait.

"Now, Madam!" he cried, "the whole of the land mine without payment."

"The whole," she replied.

"If she should be arraigned and convicted it will be forfeited to the crown," thought Nowell; "the offer is tempting."

"Your attorney is here, and can prepare the conveyance at once," pursued Mistress Nutter, "a sum can be stated to lend a colour to the proceeding, and I will give you a private memorandum that I will not claim it. All I require is, that you clear me completely from the dark aspersions cast upon my character, and you abandon your projects against my adopted daughter, Alizon, as well as against those two poor old women, Mothers Demdike and Chattox."

"How can I be sure that I shall not be deluded in the

matter?" asked Nowell, "the writing may disappear from the parchment you give me, or the parchment itself may turn to ashes. Such things have occurred in transactions with witches. Or it may be that by consenting to the compact I may emperil my own soul."

"Tush!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter; "these are idle fears. But it is no idle threat on my part, when I tell you you shall not go forth unless you consent."

"You cannot hinder me, woman," cried Nowell, rising.

"You shall see," rejoined the lady, making two or three rapid passes before him, which instantly stiffened his limbs, and deprived him of the power of motion. "Now stir if you can," she added with a laugh.

Nowell essayed to cry out, but his tongue refused its office. Hearing and sight, however, were left him, and he saw Mistress Nutter take a large volume, bound in black, from the shelf, and open it at a page covered with cabalistic characters. after which, she pronounced some words that sounded like an invocation.

As she concluded, the tapestry against the wall was raised, and from behind it appeared a figure in all respects resembling the magistrate: it had the same sharp features, the same keen eyes and bushy eyebrows, the same stoop in the shoulders, the same habiliments. It was, in short, his double.

Mistress Nutter regarded him with a look of triumph.

"Since you refuse, with my injunctions," she said, "your double will prove more tractable. He will go forth and do all I would have had you do, while I have but to stamp upon the floor and a dungeon will yawn beneath your feet, where you will lie immured till doomsday. The same fate will attend your crafty associate, Master Potts — so that neither of you will be missed — ha! ha!"

The unfortunate magistrate fully comprehended his danger, but he could now neither offer remonstrance nor entreaty. What was passing in his breast seemed known to Mistress Nutter, for she motioned the double to stay, and touching the brow of Nowell with the point of her fore-finger, instantly restored his power of speech.

"I will give you a last chance," she said. "Well you obey me now?"

"I must, perforce," replied Nowell; "the contest is too unequal."

"You may retire, then," she cried to the double. And stepping backwards, the figure lifted up the tapestry, and disappeared behind it.

"I can breathe, now that infernal being is gone," cried Nowell, sinking into the chair. "Oh! Madam, you have indeed terrible power."

"You will do well not to brave it again," she rejoined. "Shall I summon Master Potts to prepare the conveyance?"

"Oh! no — no!" cried Nowell. "I do not desire the land. I will not have it. I should pay too dearly for it. Only let me get out of this horrible place!"

"Not so quickly, Sir," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Before you go hence, I must bind you to the performance of my injunctions. Pronounce these words after me, — 'May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise.'"

"I will never utter them!" cried Nowell, shuddering.

"Then I shall recall your double," said the lady.

"Hold, hold!" exclaimed Nowell. "Let me know what you require of me."

"I require absolute silence on your part, as to all you have seen and heard here, and cessation of hostility, towards me and the persons I have already named," replied Mistress

Nutter; "and I require a declaration from you, in the presence of the two Asshetons, that you are fully satisfied of the justice of my claims in respect to the land; and that, mortified by your defeat, you have brought a false charge against me, which you now sincerely regret. This I require from you; and you must ratify the promise by the abjuration I have proposed. 'May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise.'"

The magistrate repeated the words after her. As he finished, mocking laughter, apparently resounding from below, smote his ears.

"Enough!" cried Mistress Nutter, triumphantly; "and now take good heed that you swerve not in the slightest degree from your word, or you are for ever lost."

Again the mocking laughter was heard, and Nowell would have rushed forth, if Mistress Nutter had not withheld him.

"Stay!" she cried, "I have not done with you, yet! My witnesses must hear your declaration. Remember!"

And placing her finger upon her lips, in token of silence, she stepped backwards, drew aside the tapestry, and opening the door, called to the two Asshetons, both of whom instantly came to her, and were not a little surprised to learn that all differences had been adjusted, and that Roger Nowell acknowledged himself entirely in error, retracting all the charges he had brought against her; while, on her part, she was fully satisfied with his explanations and apologies, and promised not to entertain any feelings of resentment towards him.

"You have made up the matter, indeed," cried Nicholas, "and, as Master Roger Nowell is a widower, perhaps a match may come of it. Such an arrangement —"

"This is no occasion for jesting, Nicholas," interrupted the lady, sharply.

"Nay, I but threw out a hint," rejoined the squire. "It would set the question of the land for ever at rest."

"It is set at rest — for ever," replied the lady, with a side look at the magistrate.

"'May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise,'" repeated Nowell to himself. "Those words bind me like a chain of iron. I must get out of this accursed house as fast as I can."

As if his thoughts had been divined by Mistress Nutter, she here observed to him, "To make our reconciliation complete, Master Nowell, I must entreat you to pass the day with me. I will give you the best entertainment my house affords — nay, I will take no denial; and you, too, Nicholas, and you, Richard, you will stay and keep the worthy magistrate company."

The two Asshetons willingly assented, but Roger Nowell would fain have been excused. A look, however, from his hostess enforced compliance.

"The proposal will be highly agreeable, I am sure, to Master Potts," remarked Nicholas, with a laugh; "for, though much better, in consequence of the balsam applied by Blackadder, he is scarcely in condition for the saddle."

"I will warrant him well to-morrow morning," said Mistress Nutter.

"Where is he?" inquired Nowell.

"In the library with Parson Holden," replied Nicholas; "making himself as comfortable as circumstances will permit, with a flask of Rhenish before him."

"I will go to him, then," said Nowell.

"Take care what you say to him," observed Mistress Nutter, in a low tone, and raising her finger to her lips.

Heaving a deep sigh, the magistrate then repaired to the library, a small room panelled with black oak, and furnished

with a few cases of ancient tomes. The attorney and the divine were seated at a table, with a big square-built bottle and long-stemmed glasses before them, and Master Potts, with a wry grimace, excused himself from rising on his respected and singular good client's approach.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Nowell, gruffly; "we shall not leave Rough Lee to-day."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Potts, moving the cushions on his chair and eyeing the square-built bottle affectionately.

"Nor to-morrow, it may be — nor the day after — nor at all, possibly," said Nowell.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Potts, starting, and wincing with pain. "What is the meaning of all this, worthy Sir?"

"'May I become the subject of the Fiend if I fail in my promise,'" rejoined Nowell, with a groan.

"What promise, worshipful Sir?" cried Potts, staring with surprise.

The magistrate got out the words, "My promise to —" and then he stopped suddenly.

"To Mistress Nutter?" suggested Potts.

"Don't ask me," exclaimed Nowell, fiercely. "Don't draw any erroneous conclusions, man. I mean nothing — I say nothing!"

"He is certainly bewitched," observed Parson Holden in an undertone to the attorney.

"It was by your advice I entered this house," thundered Nowell, "and may all the ill arising from it alight upon your head!"

"My respected client!" implored Potts.

"I am no longer your client!" shrieked the infuriated magistrate. "I dismiss you. I will have nought to do with you more. I wish I had never seen your ugly little face!"

"You were quite right, reverend Sir," observed Potts aside to the divine; "he is certainly bewitched, or he never would behave in this way to his best friend. My excellent Sir," he added, to Nowell, "I beseech you to calm yourself, and listen to me. My motive for wishing you to comply with Mistress Nutter's request was this: we were in a dilemma from which there was no escape, my wounded condition preventing me from flight, and all your followers being dispersed. Knowing your discretion, I apprehended that finding the tables turned against you, you would not desire to play a losing game, and I therefore counselled apparent submission as the best means of disarming your antagonist. Whatever arrangement you have made with Mistress Nutter is neither morally nor legally binding upon you."

"You think not!" cried Nowell. "'May I become subject to the Fiend if I violate my promise!'"

"What promise have you made, Sir?" inquired Potts and Holden together.

"Do not question me," cried Nowell, "it is sufficient that I am tied and bound by it."

The attorney reflected a little, and then observed to Holden, "It is evident some unfair practices have been resorted to with our respected friend, to extort a promise from him which he cannot violate. It is also possible, from what he let fall at first, that an attempt may be made to detain us prisoners within this house, and, for aught I know, Master Nowell may have given his word not to go forth without Mistress Nutter's permission. Under these circumstances, I would beg of you, reverend Sir, as an especial favour to us both, to ride over to Whalley, and acquaint Sir Ralph Assheton with our situation."

As this suggestion was made, Nowell's countenance

brightened up. The expression was not lost upon the attorney, who perceived he was on the right tack.

"Tell the worthy baronet," continued Potts, "that his old and esteemed friend, Master Roger Nowell, is in great jeopardy — am I not right, Sir?"

The magistrate nodded.

"Tell him he is forcibly detained a prisoner, and requires sufficient force to effect his immediate liberation. Tell him, also, that Master Nowell charges Mistress Nutter with robbing him of his land by witchcraft."

"No, no," interrupted Nowell, "do not tell him that. I no longer charge her with it."

"Then, tell him that I do," cried Potts; "and that Master Nowell has strangely, very strangely, altered his mind."

"'May I become subject to the Fiend if I violate my promise!'" said the magistrate.

"Ay, tell him that," cried the attorney — "tell him the worthy gentleman is constantly repeating that sentence. It will explain all. And now, reverend Sir, let me entreat you to set out without delay, or your departure may be prevented."

"I will go at once," said Holden.

As he was about to quit the apartment, Mistress Nutter appeared at the door. Confusion was painted on the countenances of all three.

"Whither go you, Sir?" demanded the lady sharply.

"On a mission which cannot be delayed, Madam," replied Holden.

"You cannot quit my house at present," she rejoined, peremptorily. "These gentlemen stay to dine with me, and I cannot dispense with your company."

"My duty calls me hence," returned the divine. "With

all thanks for your proferred hospitality, I must perforce decline it."

"Not when I command you to stay," she rejoined, raising her hand; "I am absolute mistress here."

"Not over the servants of heaven, Madam," replied the divine, taking a Bible from his pocket, and placing it before him. "By this sacred volume I shield myself against your spells, and command you to let me pass."

And as he went forth, Mistress Nutter, unable to oppose him, shrank back.

CHAPTER XI.

Mother Demdike.

THE heavy rain, which began to fall as Roger Nowell entered Rough Lee, had now ceased, and the sun shone forth again brilliantly, making the garden look so fresh and beautiful that Richard proposed a stroll within it to Alizon. The young girl seemed doubtful at first whether to comply with the invitation; but she finally assented, and they went forth together alone, for Nicholas, fancying they could dispense with his company, only attended them as far as the door, where he remained looking after them, laughing to himself, and wondering how matters would end. "No good will come of it, I fear," mused the worthy squire, shaking his head, "and I am scarcely doing right in allowing Dick to entangle himself in this fashion. But where is the use of giving advice to a young man who is over head and ears in ove? He will never listen to it, and will only resent interference. Dick must take his chance, I have already pointed out the danger to him, and if he chooses to run headlong into the pit, why, I cannot hinder him. After all, I am not much surprised. Alizon's beauty is quite irresistible, and,

were all smooth and straightforward in her history, there could be no reason why — pshaw! I am as foolish as the lad himself. Sir Richard Assheton, the proudest man in the shire, would disown his son if he married against his inclinations. No, my pretty youthful pair, since nothing but misery awaits you, I advise you to make the most of your brief season of happiness. I should certainly do so were the case my own."

Meanwhile, the objects of these ruminations had reached the terrace overlooking Pendle Water, and were pacing slowly backwards and forwards along it.

"One might be very happy in this sequestered spot, Alizon," observed Richard. "To some persons it might appear dull, but to me, if blest with you, it would be little short of Paradise."

"Alas! Richard," she replied, forcing a smile, "why conjure up visions of happiness which never can be realised? But even with you I do not think I could be happy here. There is something about the house which, when I first beheld it, filled me with unaccountable terror. Never since I was a mere infant have I been within it till to-day, and yet it was quite familiar to me — horribly familiar. I knew the hall in which we stood together, with its huge arched fire-place, and the armorial bearings upon it, and could point out the stone on which were carved my father's initials 'R. N.,' with the date '1572.' I knew the tapestry on the walls, and the painted glass in the long range windows. I knew the old oak staircase, and the gallery beyond it, and the room to which my mother led me. I knew the portraits painted on the panels, and at once recognised my father. I knew the great carved oak bedstead in this room, and the high chimney-piece, and the raised hearthstone, and shuddered as I gazed at it. You will ask me how these things

could be familiar to me? I will tell you. I had seen them repeatedly in my dreams. They have haunted me for years, but I only to-day knew they had an actual existence, or were in any way connected with my own history. The sight of that house inspired me with a horror I have not been able to overcome; and I have a presentiment that some ill will befal me within it. I would never willingly dwell there."

"The warning voice within you, which should never be despised, prompts you to quit it," cried Richard; "and I also urge you in like manner."

"In vain," sighed Alizon. "This terrace is beautiful," she added, as they resumed their walk, "and I shall often come hither, if I am permitted. At sunset, this river, and the woody heights above it, must be enchanting; and I do not dislike the savage character of the surrounding scenery. It enhances, by contrast, the beauty of this solitude. I only wish the spot commanded a view of Pendle Hill."

"You are like my cousin Nicholas, who thinks no prospect complete unless that hill forms part of it," said Richard; "but since I find that you will often come hither at sunset, I shall not despair of seeing and conversing with you again, even if I am forbidden the house by Mistress Nutter. That thicket is an excellent hiding-place, and this stream is easily crossed."

"We can have no secret interviews, Richard," replied Alizon; "I shall come hither to think of you, but not to meet you. You must never return to Rough Lee again — that is, not unless some change takes place, which I dare not anticipate — but, hist! I am called. I must go back to the house."

"The voice came from the other side of the river," said Richard — "and, hark! it calls again. Who can it be?"

"It is Jennet," replied Alizon, "I see her now."

And she pointed out the little girl standing beside an alder on the opposite bank.

"Yo didna notice me efore, Alizon," cried Jennet in her sharp tones, and with her customary provoking laugh, "boh ey seed yo plain 'enuff, an heer'd yo too; an ey heer'd Mester Ruchot say he wad hide i' this thicket, an cross the river to meet ye at sunset. Little pigs, they say, ha' lang ears, an mine werena gi'en me fo' nowt."

"They have somewhat misinformed you in this instance," replied Alizon, "but how, in the name of wonder, did you come here?"

"Varry easily," replied Jennet, "boh ey hanna time to tell ye now. Granny Demdike has sent me hither wi' a message to ye and Mistress Nutter. Boh may be, ye winna loike Mester Ruchot to hear what ey ha' getten to tell ye."

"I will leave you," said Richard, about to depart.

"Oh! no, no!" cried Alizon, "she can have nothing to say which you may not hear."

"Shan ey go back to Granny Demdike, an tell her yo're too proud to receive her message?" asked the child.

"On no account," whispered Richard. "Do not let her anger the old hag."

"Speak, Jennet," said Alizon, in a tone of kind persuasion.

"Ey shanna speak onless yo cum ower t' wetur to me," replied the little girl; "an whot ey ha to tell consarns ye mitch."

"I can easily cross," observed Alizon to Richard. "Those stones seem placed on purpose."

Upon this, descending from the terrace to the river's brink, and springing lightly upon the first stone which reared its head above the foaming tide, she bounded to another, and so in an instant was across the stream. Richard saw her ascend the opposite bank, and approach Jennet, who withdrew behind

the alder; and then he fancied he perceived an old beldame, partly concealed by the intervening branches of the tree, advance and seize hold of her. Then there was a scream; and the sound had scarcely reached the young man's ears before he was down the bank and across the river, but when he reached the alder, neither Alizon, nor Jennet, nor the old beldame were to be seen.

The terrible conviction that she had been carried off by Mother Demdike then smote him, and though he continued his search for her among the adjoining bushes, it was with fearful misgivings. No answer was returned to his shouts, nor could he discover any trace of the means by which Alizon had been spirited away.

After some time spent in ineffectual search, uncertain what course to pursue, and with a heart full of despair, Richard crossed the river, and proceeded towards the house, in front of which he found Mistress Nutter and Nicholas, both of whom seemed surprised when they perceived he was unaccompanied by Alizon. The lady immediately, and somewhat sharply, questioned him as to what had become of her adopted daughter, and appeared at first to doubt his answer; but at length, unable to question his sincerity, she became violently agitated.

"The poor girl has been conveyed away by Mother Demdike," she cried, "though for what purpose I am at a loss to conceive. The old hag could not cross the running water, and therefore resorted to that stratagem."

"Alizon must not be left in her hands, Madam," said Richard.

"She must not," replied the lady. "If Blackadder, whom I have sent after Parson Holden, were here, I would despatch him instantly to Malkin Tower."

"I will go instead," said Richard.

"You had better accept his offer," interposed Nicholas; "he will serve you as well as Blackadder."

"Go I shall, Madam," cried Richard; "if not on your account, on my own."

"Come, then, with me," said the lady, entering the house, "and I will furnish you with that which shall be your safeguard in the enterprise."

With this, she proceeded to the closet where her interview with Roger Nowell had been held; and, unlocking an ebony cabinet, took from a drawer within it a small flat piece of gold, graven with mystic characters, and having a slender chain of the same metal attached to it. Throwing the chain over Richard's neck, she said, "Place this talisman, which is of sovereign virtue, near your heart, and no witchcraft shall have power over you. But be careful that you are not by any artifice deprived of it, for the old hag will soon discover that you possess some charm to protect you against her spells. You are impatient to be gone, but I have not yet done," she continued, taking down a small silver bugle from a hook, and giving it him. "On reaching Malkin Tower wind this horn thrice, and the old witch will appear at the upper window. Demand admittance in my name, and she will not dare to refuse you; or, if she does, tell her you know the secret entrance to her stronghold, and will have recourse to it. And in case this should be needful, I will now disclose it to you, but you must not use it till other means fail. When opposite the door, which you will find is high up in the building, take ten paces to the left, and if you examine the masonry at the foot of the tower, you will perceive one stone somewhat darker than the rest. At the bottom of this stone, and concealed by a patch of heath, you will discover a knob of iron. Touch it, and it will give you an opening to a vaulted chamber, whence you can mount to the upper room. Even then you may experience

some difficulty, but with resolution you will surmount all obstacles."

"I have no fear of success, Madam," replied Richard, confidently.

And quitting her, he proceeded to the stables, and calling for his horse, vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off towards the bridge.

Fast as Richard rode up the steep hill side, still faster did the black clouds gather over his head. No natural cause could have produced so instantaneous a change in the aspect of the sky, and the young man viewed it with uneasiness, and wished to get out of the thicket in which he was now involved before the threatened thunderstorm commenced. But the hill was steep, and the road bad, being full of loose stones, and crossed in many places by bare roots of trees. Though ordinarily sure-footed, Merlin stumbled frequently, and Richard was obliged to slacken his pace. It grew darker and darker, and the storm seemed ready to burst upon him. The smaller birds ceased singing, and screened themselves under the thickest foliage; the pie chattered incessantly; the jay screamed; the bittern flew past booming heavily in the air; the raven croaked; the heron arose from the river and speeded off with his long neck stretched out; and the falcon, who had been hovering over him, swooped sidelong down and sought shelter beneath an impending rock; the rabbit scudded off to his burrow in the brake; and the hare, erecting himself for a moment, as if to listen to the note of danger, crept timorously off into the long dry grass.

It grew so dark at last that the road was difficult to discern, and the dense rows of trees on either side assumed a fantastic appearance in the deep gloom. Richard was now more than half-way up the hill, and the thicket had become more tangled and intricate, and the road narrower and more rugged. All

at once Merlin stopped, quivering in every limb, as if in extremity of terror.

Before the rider, and right in his path, glared a pair of red fiery orbs, with something dusky and obscure linked to them; but whether of man or beast he could not distinguish.

Richard called to it. No answer. He struck spurs into the reeking flanks of his horse. The animal refused to stir. Just then there was a moaning sound in the wood, as of some one in pain. He turned in the direction, shouted, but received no answer. When he looked back the red eyes were gone.

Then Merlin moved forward of his own accord, but ere he had gone far, the eyes were visible again, glaring at the rider from the wood. This time they approached, dilating, and increasing in glowing intensity, till they scorched him like burning glasses. Bethinking him of the talisman, Richard drew it forth. The light was instantly extinguished, and the indistinct figure accompanying it melted into darkness.

Once more Merlin resumed his toilsome way, and Richard was marvelling that the storm so long suspended its fury, when the sky was riven by a sudden blaze, and a crackling bolt shot down and struck the earth at his feet. The affrighted steed reared aloft, and was with difficulty prevented from falling backwards upon his rider. Almost before he could be brought to his feet, an awful peal of thunder burst over head, and it required Richard's utmost efforts to prevent him from rushing madly down the hill.

The storm had now fairly commenced. Flash followed flash, and peal succeeded peal without intermission. The rain descended hissing and spouting, and presently ran down the hill in a torrent, adding to the horseman's other difficulties and dangers. To heighten the terror of the scene, strange shapes, revealed by the lightning, were seen flitting among

the trees, and strange sounds were heard, though overpowered by the dreadful rolling of the thunder.

But Richard's resolution continued unshaken, and he forced Merlin on. He had not proceeded far, however, when the animal uttered a cry of fright, and began beating the air with his fore hoofs. The lightning enabled Richard to discern the cause of this new distress. Coiled round the poor beast's legs, all whose efforts to disengage himself from the terrible assailant were ineffectual, was a large black snake, seemingly about to plunge its poisonous fangs into the flesh. Again having recourse to the talisman, and bending down, Richard stretched it towards the snake, upon which the reptile instantly darted its arrow-shaped head against him, but instead of wounding him, its forked teeth encountered the piece of gold, and as if stricken a violent blow, it swiftly untwined itself, and fled, hissing, into the thicket.

Richard was now obliged to dismount and lead his horse. In this way he toiled slowly up the hill. The storm continued with unabated fury: the red lightning played around him, the brattling thunder stunned him, and the pelting rain poured down upon his head. But he was no more molested. Save for the vivid flashes, it had become dark as night, but they served to guide him on his way.

At length he got out of the thicket, and trod upon the turf, but it was rendered so slippery by moisture, that he could scarcely keep his feet, while the lightning no longer aided him. Fearing he had taken a wrong course, he stood still, and while debating with himself a blaze of light illumined the wide heath, and showed him the object of his search, Malkin Tower, standing alone, like a beacon, at about a quarter of a mile's distance, on the further side of the hill. Was it disturbed fancy, or did he really behold on the summit of the structure a grisly shape resembling—if it resembled any thing

human — a gigantic black cat, with roughened staring skin, and flaming eye-balls.

Nerved by the sight of the tower, Richard was on his steed's back in an instant, and the animal, having in some degree recovered his spirits, galloped off with him, and kept his feet, in spite of the slippery state of the road. Ere long, another flash showed the young man that he was drawing rapidly near the tower, and dismounting, he tied Merlin to a tree, and hurried towards the unhallowed pile. When within twenty paces of it, mindful of Mistress Nutter's injunctions, he placed the bugle to his lips, and winded it thrice. The summons, though clear and loud, sounded strangely in the portentous silence.

Scarcely had the last notes died away, when a light shone through the dark red curtains hanging before a casement in the upper part of the tower. The next moment, these were drawn aside, and a face appeared, so frightful, so charged with infernal wickedness and malice, that Richard's blood grew chill at the sight. Was it man or woman? The white beard and the large, broad, masculine character of the countenance seemed to denote the former, but the garb was that of a female. The face was at once hideous and fantastic — the eyes set across — the mouth awry — the right cheek marked by a mole shining with black hair, and horrible from its contrast to the rest of the visage, and the brow branded as if by a streak of blood. A black thrum cap constituted the old witch's head-gear, and from beneath it her hoary hair escaped in long elf-locks. The lower part of her person was hidden from view, but she appeared to be as broad-shouldered as a man, and her bulky person was wrapped in a tawny-coloured robe. Throwing open the window, she looked forth, and demanded, in harsh, imperious tones, —

"Who dares to summon Mother Demdike?"

"A messenger from Mistress Nutter," replied Richard. "I am come in her name to demand the restitution of Alizon Device, whom thou hast forcibly and wrongfully taken from her."

"Alizon Device is my grand-daughter, and, as such, belongs to me, and not to Mistress Nutter," rejoined Mother Demdike.

"Thou knowest thou speakest false, foul hag," cried Richard. "Alizon is no blood of thine. Open the door and cast down the ladder, or I will find other means of entrance."

"Try them, then," rejoined Mother Demdike. And she closed the casement sharply, and drew the curtains over it.

After reconnoitering the building for a moment, Richard moved quickly to the left, and counting ten paces, as directed by Mistress Nutter, began to search among the thick grass growing near the base of the tower for the concealed entrance. It was too dark to distinguish any difference in the colour of the masonry, but he was sure he could not be far wrong, and presently his hand came in contact with a knob of iron. He pressed it, but it did not yield to the touch. Again more forcibly, but with like ill success. Could he be mistaken? He tried the next stone, and discovered another knob upon it, but this was as immoveable as the first. He went on, and then found that each stone was alike, and that if amongst the number he had chanced upon the one worked by the secret spring, it had refused to act. On examining the structure so far as he was able to do in the gloom, he found he had described the whole circle of the tower, and was about to commence the search anew, when a creaking sound was heard above, and a light streamed suddenly down upon him. The door had been opened by the old witch, and she stood there with a lamp in her hand, its yellow flame illumining her hideous visage and short, square, powerfully-built frame.

Her throat was like that of a bull; her hands of extraordinary size; and her arms, which were bare to the shoulder, brawny and muscular.

"What, still outside?" she cried, in a jeering tone, and with a wild discordant laugh. "Methought thou affirmedst thou couldst find a way into my dwelling."

"I do not yet despair of finding it," replied Richard.

"Fool!" screamed the hag. "I tell thee it is in vain to attempt it without my consent. With a word, I could make these walls one solid mass, without window or outlet, from base to summit. With a word, I could shower stones upon thy head, and crush thee to dust. With a word, I could make the earth swallow thee up. With a word, I could whisk thee hence to the top of Pendle Hill. Ha! ha! Dost fear me now?"

"No," replied Richard, undauntedly. "And the word thou menacest me with shall never be uttered."

"Why not?" asked Mother Demdike, derisively.

"Because thou wouldst not brave the resentment of one whose power is equal to thine own — if not greater," replied the young man.

"Greater it is not — neither equal," rejoined the old hag, haughtily; "but I do not desire a quarrel with Alice Nutter. Only let her not meddle with me."

"Once more, art thou willing to admit me?" demanded Richard.

"Ay, upon one condition," replied Mother Demdike. "Thou shalt learn it anon. Stand aside while I let down the ladder."

Richard obeyed, and a pair of narrow wooden steps dropped to the ground.

"Now mount, if thou hast the courage," cried the hag.

The young man was instantly beside her, but she stood in

the doorway, and barred his further progress with her extended staff. Now that he was face to face with her, he wondered at his own temerity. There was nothing human in her countenance, and infernal light gleamed in her strangely-set eyes. Her personal strength, evidently unimpaired by age, or preserved by magical art, seemed equal to her malice; and she appeared as capable of executing any atrocity, as of conceiving it. She saw the effect produced upon him, and chuckled with malicious satisfaction.

"Saw'st thou ever face like mine?" she cried. "No, I wot not. But I would rather inspire aversion and terror than love. Love! — foh! I would rather see men shrink from me, and shudder at my approach, than smile upon me and court me. I would rather freeze the blood in their veins, than set it boiling with passion. Ho! ho!"

"Thou art a fearful being, indeed!" exclaimed Richard, appalled.

"Fearful, am I?" ejaculated the old witch, with renewed laughter. "At last, thou own'st it. Why, ay, I *am* fearful. It is my wish to be so. I live to plague mankind — to blight and blast them — to scare them with my looks — to work them mischief. Ho! ho! And now, let us look at thee," she continued, holding the lamp over him. "Why, soh? — a comely youth! And the young maids doat upon thee, I doubt not, and praise thy blooming cheeks, thy bright eyes, thy flowing locks, and thy fine limbs. I hate thy beauty, boy, and would mar it! — would canker thy wholesome flesh, dim thy lustrous eyes, and strike thy vigorous limbs with palsy, till they should shake like mine! I am half-minded to do it," she added, raising her staff, and glaring at him with inconceivable malignity.

"Hold!" exclaimed Richard, taking the talisman from his

breast, and displaying it to her. "I am armed against thy malice!"

Mother Demdike's staff fell from her grasp.

"I knew thou wert in some way protected," she cried furiously. "And so it is a piece of gold — with magic characters upon it, eh?" she added, suddenly changing her tone; "Let me look at it."

"Thou seest it plain enough," rejoined Richard. "Now, stand aside and let me pass, for thou perceivest I have power to force an entrance."

"I see it — I see it," replied Mother Demdike, with affected humility. "I see it is in vain to struggle with thee, or rather with the potent lady who sent thee. Tarry where thou art, and I will bring Alizon to thee."

"I almost mistrust thee," said Richard — "but be speedy."

"I will be scarce a moment," said the witch; "but I must warn thee that she is —"

"What — what hast thou done to her, thou wicked hag?" cried Richard, in alarm.

"She is distraught," said Mother Demdike.

"Distraught!" echoed Richard.

"But thou canst easily cure her," said the old hag, significantly.

"Ay, so I can, cried Richard with sudden joy — "the talisman! Bring her to me at once."

Mother Demdike departed, leaving him in a state of indescribable agitation. The walls of the tower were of immense thickness, and the entrance to the chamber towards which the arched doorway led was covered by a curtain of old arras, behind which the hag had disappeared. Scarcely had she entered the room when a scream was heard, and Richard heard his own name pronounced by a voice which, in spite of its agonised tones, he at once recognised. The cries were

repeated, and he then heard Mother Demdike call out, "Come hither! come hither!"

Instantly rushing forward and dashing aside the tapestry, he found himself in a mysterious-looking circular chamber, with a massive oak table in the midst of it. There were many strange objects in the room, but he saw only Alizon, who was struggling with the old witch, and clinging desperately to the table. He called to her by name as he advanced, but her bewildered looks proved that she did not know him.

"Alizon, dear Alizon! I am come to free you," he exclaimed.

But in place of answering him she uttered a piercing scream.

"The talisman, the talisman!" cried the hag. "I cannot undo my own work. Place the chain round her neck, and the gold near her heart, that she may experience its full virtue."

Richard unsuspectingly complied with the suggestion of the temptress; but the moment he had parted with the piece of gold the figure of Alizon vanished, the chamber was buried in gloom, and, amidst a hubbub of wild laughter, he was dragged by the powerful arm of the witch through the arched doorway, and flung from it to the ground, the shock of the fall producing immediate insensibility.

CHAPTER XII.

The mysteries of Malkin Tower.

It was a subterranean chamber; gloomy, and of vast extent; the roof low, and supported by nine ponderous stone columns, to which rings and rusty chains were attached, still retaining the mouldering bones of those they had held captive in life. Amongst others was a gigantic skeleton, quite entire,

with an iron girdle round the middle. Fragments of mortality were elsewhere scattered about, showing the numbers who had perished in the place. On either side were cells closed by massive doors, secured by bolts and locks. At one end were three immense coffers, made of oak, hooped with iron, and fastened by large padlocks. Near them stood a large armory, likewise of oak, and sculptured with the ensigns of Whalley Abbey, proving it had once belonged to that establishment. Probably it had been carried off by some robber band. At the opposite end of the vault were two niches, each occupied by a rough-hewn statue — the one representing a warlike figure, with a visage of extraordinary ferocity, and the other an anchoress, in her hood and wimple, with a rosary in her hand. On the ground beneath lay a plain flag, covering the mortal remains of the wicked pair, and proclaiming them to be Isole de Heton and Blackburn, the freebooter. The pillars were ranged in three lines, so as to form, with the arches above them, a series of short passages, in the midst of which stood an altar, and near it a large cauldron. In front, elevated on a block of granite, was a marvellous piece of sculpture, wrought in jet, and representing a demon seated on a throne. The visage was human, but the beard that of a goat, while the feet and lower limbs were like those of the same animal. Two curled horns grew behind the ears, and a third, shaped like a conch, sprang from the centre of the forehead, from which burst a blue flame, throwing a ghastly light on the objects surrounding it.

The only discernible approach to the vault was a steep narrow stone staircase, closed at the top by a heavy trap-door. Other outlet apparently there was none. Some little air was admitted to this foul abode through flues contrived in the walls, the entrances to which were grated, but the light of day never came there. The flame, however, issuing from the brow

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of the demon image, like the lamps in the sepulchres of the disciples of the Rosy Cross, was ever-burning. Behind the sable statue was a deep well, with water as black as ink, wherein swarmed snakes, and toads, and other noxious reptiles; and as the lurid light fell upon its surface it glittered like a dusky mirror, unless when broken by the horrible things that lurked beneath, or crawled about upon its slimy brim. But snakes and toads were not the only tenants of the vault. At the head of the steps squatted a monstrous and misshapen animal, bearing some resemblance to a cat, but as big as a tiger. Its skin was black and shaggy; its eyes glowed like those of the hyæna; and its cry was like that of the same treacherous beast. Among the gloomy colonnades other swart and bestial shapes could be indistinctly seen moving to and fro.

In this abode of horror were two human beings, — one, a young maiden of exquisite beauty; and the other, almost a child, and strangely deformed. The elder, overpowered by terror, was clinging to a pillar for support, while the younger, who might naturally be expected to exhibit the greatest alarm, appeared wholly unconcerned, and derided her companion's fears.

"Oh, Jennet!" exclaimed the elder of the two, "is there no means of escape?"

"None whatever," replied the other. "Yo mun stay here till Granny Demdike cums fo ye."

"Oh! that the earth would open and snatch me from these horrors," cried Alizon. "My reason is forsaking me. Would I could kneel and pray for deliverance! But something prevents me."

"Reet!" replied Jennet. "It's os mitch os yer loife 's worth to kneel an pray here, onless yo choose to go an throw yersel at th' feet o' yon black image."

"Kneel to that idol — never!" exclaimed Alizon. And while striving to call upon heaven for aid, a sharp convulsion seized her, and deprived her of the power of utterance.

"Ey towd yo how it wad be," remarked Jennet, who watched her narrowly. "Yo 're neaw i' a church here, an if yo want to warship, it mun be at yon altar. Dunna yo hear how angry the cats are — how they growl an spit? An see how their een gliss'n! They 'll tear yo i' pieces, loike so many tigers, if yo offend 'em."

"Tell me why I am brought here, Jennet?" inquired Alizon, after a brief pause.

"Granny Demdike will tell yo that," replied the little girl; "boh to my belief," she added, with a mocking laugh, "hoo means to may a witch o' ye, loikeaw the rest on us."

"She cannot do that without my consent," cried Alizon, "and I would die a thousand deaths rather than yield it."

"That remains to be seen," replied Jennet, tauntingly. "Yo 're obstinate enuff, nah doubt. Boh Granny Demdike is used to deal wi' sich folk."

"Oh! why was I born?" cried Alizon, bitterly.

"Yo may weel ask that," responded Jennet, with a loud unfeeling laugh; "fo ey see neaw great use yo're on, wi' yer protty feace an bright een, onless it be to may one hate ye."

"Is it possible you can say this to me, Jennet?" cried Alizon. "What have I done to incur your hatred? I have ever loved you, and striven to please and serve you. I have always taken your part against others, even when you were in the wrong. Oh! Jennet, you cannot hate me."

"Boh ey do," replied the little girl, spitefully. "Ey hate yo now warser than onny wan else. Ey hate yo because yo are neaw lunger my sister — becose yo 're a grand ledy's dowter, an a grand ledy yersel. Ey hate yo becose yung Ruchot Assheton loves yo — an becose yo ha better luck i'

aw things than ey have, or con expect to have. That 's why I hate yo, Alizon. When yo are a witch ey shan love yo, for then we shan be equals once more."

"That will never be, Jennet," said Alizon, sadly, but firmly. "Your grandmother may immure me in this dungeon, and scare away my senses; but she will never rob me of my hopes of salvation."

As the words were uttered, a clang like that produced by a stricken gong shook the vault; the beasts roared fiercely; the black waters of the fountain bubbled up, and were lashed into foam by the angry reptiles; and a larger jet of flame than before burst from the brow of the demon statue.

"Ey ha' warned ye, Alizon," said Jennet, alarmed by these demonstrations, "boh since ye pay no heed to owt ey say, ey'st leave yo to yer fate."

"Oh! stay with me, stay with me, Jennet! shrieked Alizon. "By our past sisterly affection I implore you to remain! You are some protection to me from these dreadful beings."

"Ey dunna want to protect yo onless yo do os yo're bidd'n," replied Jennet. "Whoy should yo be better than me?"

"Ah! why, indeed?" cried Alizon. "Would I had the power to turn your heart — to open your eyes to evil — to save you, Jennet."

These words were followed by another clang, louder and more brattling than the first. The solid walls of the dungeon were shaken, and the heavy columns rocked; while, to Alizon's affrighted gaze, it seemed as if the sable statue arose upon its ebon throne and stretched out its arm menacingly towards her. The poor girl was saved from further terror by insensibility.

How long she remained in this condition she could not tell,

nor did it appear that any efforts were made to restore her, but when she recovered, she found herself stretched upon a rude pallet within an arched recess, the entrance to which was screened by a piece of tapestry. On lifting it aside she perceived she was no longer in the vault, but in an upper chamber, as she judged, and not incorrectly, of the tower. The room was lofty and circular, and the walls of enormous thickness, as shown by the deep embrasures of the windows; in one of which, the outlet having been built up, the pallet was placed. A massive oak table, two or three chairs of antique shape, and a wooden stool, constituted the furniture of the room. The stool was set near the fiereplace, and beside it stood a strangely-fashioned spinning-wheel, which had apparently been recently used; but neither the old hag nor her grand-daughter were visible. Alizon could not tell whether it was night or day, but a lamp was burning upon the table, its feeble light only imperfectly illumining the chamber, and scarcely revealing several strange objects dangling from the huge beams that supported the roof. Faded arras were hung against the walls, representing in one compartment the last banquet of Isole de Heton and her lover, Blackburn; in another, the Saxon Ughtred hanging from the summit of Malkin Tower; and in a third, the execution of Abbot Paslew. The subjects were as large as life, admirably depicted, and evidently worked at wondrous looms. As they swayed to and fro in the gusts, that found entrance into the chamber through some unprotected loopholes, the figures had a grim and ghostly air.

Weak, trembling, bewildered, Alizon stepped forth, and staggering towards the table sank upon a chair beside it. A fearful storm was raging without — thunder, lightning, deluging rain. Stunned and blinded, she covered her eyes, and remained thus till the fury of the tempest had in some

degree abated. She was roused at length by a creaking sound not far from her, and found it proceeded from a trap-door rising slowly on its hinges.

A thrum cap first appeared above the level of the floor; then a broad, bloated face, the mouth and chin fringed with a white beard like the whiskers of a cat; then a thick, bull throat; then a pair of brawny shoulders; then a square, thick-set frame; and Mother Demdike stood before her. A malignant smile played upon her hideous countenance, and gleamed from her eyes — those eyes so strangely placed by nature as if to intimate her doom, and that of her fated race, to whom the horrible blemish was transmitted. As the old witch leaped heavily upon the ground, the trap-door closed behind her.

"Soh, you are better, Alizon, and have quitted your couch, I find," she cried, striking her staff upon the floor. "But you look faint and feeble still. I will give you something to revive you. I have a wondrous cordial in yon closet — a rare restorative — ha! ha! It will make you well the moment it has passed your lips. I will fetch it at once."

"I will have none of it," replied Alizon; "I would rather die."

"Rather die!" echoed Mother Demdike, sarcastically, "because, forsooth, you are crossed in love. But you shall have the man of your heart yet, if you will only follow my counsel, and do as I bid you. Richard Assheton shall be yours, and with your mother's consent, provided —"

"I understand the condition you annex to the promise," interrupted Alizon, "and the terms upon which you would fulfil it; but you seek in vain to tempt me, old woman. I now comprehend why I am brought hither."

"Ay, indeed!" exclaimed the old witch. "And why is it, then, since you are so quick-witted?"

"You desire to make an offering to the evil being you serve," cried Alizon, with sudden energy. "You have entered into some dark compact, which compels you to deliver up a victim in each year to the Fiend, or your own soul becomes forfeit. Thus you have hitherto lengthened out your wretched life, and you hope to extend the term yet further through me. I have heard this tale before, but I would not believe it. Now I do. This is why you have stolen me from my mother — have braved her anger — and brought me to this impious tower."

The old hag laughed hoarsely.

"The tale thou hast heard respecting me is true," she said. "I *have* a compact which requires me to make a proselyte to the power I serve within each year, and if I fail in doing so, I must pay the penalty thou hast mentioned. A like compact exists between Mistress Nutter and the Fiend."

She paused for a moment, to watch the effect of her words on Alizon, and then resumed.

"Thy mother would have sacrificed thee if thou hadst been left with her, hut I have carried thee off, because I conceive I am best entitled to thee. Thou wert brought up as my grand-daughter, and therefore I claim thee as my own."

"And you think to deal with me as if I were a puppet in your hands?" cried Alizon.

"Ay, marry, do I," rejoined Mother Demdike, with a scream of laughter. "Thou art nothing more than a puppet — a puppet — ho! ho!"

"And you deem you can dispose of my soul without my consent?" said Alizon.

"Thy full consent will be obtained," rejoined the old hag.

"Think it not! think it not!" exclaimed Alizon. "Oh! I shall yet be delivered from this infernal bondage."

At this moment the notes of a bugle were heard.

"Saved! saved!" cried the poor girl, starting. "It is Richard come to my rescue!"

"How know'st thou that!" cried Mother Demdike, with a spiteful look.

"By an instinct that never deceives," replied Alizon, as the blast was again heard.

"This must be stopped," said the hag, waving her staff over the maiden, and transfixing her where she sat; after which, she took up the lamp, and strode towards the window.

The few words that passed between her and Richard have been already recounted. Having closed the casement and drawn the curtain before it, Mother Demdike traced a circle on the floor, muttered a spell, and then, waving her staff over Alizon, restored her power of speech and motion.

"'T was he!" exclaimed the young girl, as soon as she could find utterance. "I heard his voice."

"Why ay, 't was he, sure enough," rejoined the beldame. "He has come on a fool's errand, but he shall never return from it. Does Mistress Nutter think I will give up my prize the moment I have obtained it, for the mere asking? Does she imagine she can frighten me as she frightens others? Does she know whom she has to deal with? If not, I will tell her. I am the oldest, the boldest, and the strongest of the witches. No mystery of the black art but is known to me. I can do what mischief I will, and my desolating hand has been felt throughout this district. You may trace it like a pestilence. No one has offended me but I have terribly repaid him. I rule over the land like a queen. I exact tributes, and if they are not rendered I smite with a sharper edge than the sword. My worship is paid to the Prince of Darkness. This tower is his temple, and yon subterranean chamber the place where the mystical rites, which thou wouldst call impious and damnable, are performed. Countless Sabbaths have I attended within it,

or upon Rumbles Moor, or on the summit of Pendle Hill, or within the ruins of Whalley Abbey. Many proselytes have I made; many unbaptised babes offered up in sacrifice. I am high-priestess to the Demon, and thy mother would usurp mine office."

"Oh! spare me this horrible recital!" exclaimed Alizon, vainly trying to shut out the hag's piercing voice.

"I will spare thee nothing," pursued Mother Demdike. "Thy mother, I say, would be high-priestess in my stead. There are degrees among witches, as among other sects, and mine is the first. Mistress Nutter would deprive me of mine office; but not till her hair is as white as mine, her knowledge equal to mine, and her hatred of mankind as intense as mine — not till then shall she have it."

"No more of this, in pity!" cried Alizon.

"Often have I aided thy mother in her dark schemes," pursued the implacable hag — "nay, no later than last night I obliterated the old boundaries of her land, and erected new marks to serve her. It was a strong exercise of power; but the command came to me, and I obeyed it. No other witch could have achieved so much, not even the accursed Chattox, and she is next to myself. And how does thy mother purpose to requite me? By thrusting me aside, and stepping into my throne."

"You must be in error," cried Alizon, scarcely knowing what to say.

"My information never fails me," replied the hag, with a disdainful laugh. "Her plans are made known to me as soon as formed. I have those about her who keep strict watch upon her actions, and report them faithfully. I know why she brought thee so suddenly to Rough Lee, though thou know'st it not."

"She brought me there for safety," remarked the young

girl, hoping to allay the beldame's fury, "and because she herself desired to know how the survey of the boundaries would end."

"She brought thee there to sacrifice thee to the Fiend," cried the hag, infernal rage and malice blazing in her eyes. "She failed in propitiating him at the meeting in the ruined church of Whalley last night, when thou thyself wert present, and deliveredst Dorothy Assheton from the snare in which she was taken. And since then all has gone wrong with her. Having demanded from her familiar the cause why all things ran counter, she was told she had failed in the fulfilment of her promise — that a proselyte was required — and that thou alone wouldst be accepted."

"I!" exclaimed Alizon, horror-stricken.

"Ay, thou!" cried the hag. "No choice was allowed her, and the offering must be made to-night. After a long and painful struggle, thy mother consented."

"Oh! no — impossible! you deceive me," cried the wretched girl.

"I tell thee she consented," rejoined Mother Demdike, coldly; "and on this she made instant arrangements to return home, and in spite — as thou know'st of Sir Ralph and Lady Assheton's efforts to detain her, set forth with thee."

"All this I know," observed Alizon, sadly — "and intelligence of our departure from the abbey was conveyed to you I conclude by Jennet, to whom I bade adieu."

"Thou art right — it was," returned the hag; "but I have yet more to tell thee, for I will lay the secrets of thy mother's dark breast fully before thee. Her time is well nigh run. Thou wert made the price of its extension. If she fails in offering thee up to-night, and thou art here in my keeping, the Fiend, her master, will abandon her, and she will be delivered up to the justice of man."

Alizon covered her face with horror.

After awhile, she looked up, and exclaimed with unutterable anguish,

"And I cannot help her!"

The unpitying hag laughed derisively.

"She cannot be utterly lost," continued the young girl. "Were I near her, I would show her that heaven is merciful to the greatest sinner who repents; and teach her how to regain the lost path to salvation."

"Peace!" thundered the witch, shaking her huge hand at her, and stamping her heavy foot upon the ground. "Such words must not be uttered here. They are an offence to me. Thy mother has renounced all hopes of heaven. She has been baptised in the baptism of hell, and branded on the brow by the red finger of its ruler, and cannot be wrested from him. It is too late."

"No, no — it never can be too late," cried Alizon. "It is not even too late for you."

"Thou know'st not what thou talk'st about, foolish wench," rejoined the hag. "Our master would tear us instantly in pieces if but a thought of penitence, as thou callest it, crossed our minds. We are both doomed to an eternity of torture. But thy mother will go first — ay, first. If she had yielded thee up to-night another term would have been allowed her; but as I hold thee instead, the benefit of the sacrifice will be mine. But, hist! what was that? The youth again! Alice Nutter must have given him some potent counter-charm."

"He comes to deliver me," cried Alizon. "Richard!"

And she arose, and would have flown to the window, but Mother Demdike waved her staff over her and rooted her to the ground.

"Stay there till I require thee," chuckled the hag, moving, with ponderous footsteps, to the door.

After parleying with Richard as already related, Mother Demdike suddenly returned to Alizon, and restoring her to sensibility, placed her hideous face close to her, breathing upon her, and uttering these words, "Be thine eyes blinded and thy brain confused, so that thou mayst not know him when thou seest him, but think him another."

The spell took instant effect. Alizon staggered towards the table, Richard was summoned, and on his appearance the scene took place which has already been detailed, and which ended in his losing the talisman, and being ejected from the tower.

Alizon had been rendered invisible by the old witch, and was afterwards dragged into the arched recess by her, where, snatching the piece of gold from the young girl's neck, she exclaimed triumphantly,

"Now I defy thee, Alice Nutter. Thou canst never recover thy child. The offering shall be made to-night, and another year be added to my long term."

Alizon groaned deeply, but at a gesture from the hag, she became motionless and speechless.

A dusky indistinctly-seen figure hovered near the entrance of the embrasure. Mother Demdike beckoned it to her.

"Convey this girl to the vault, and watch over her," she said. "I will descend anon."

Upon this, the shadowy arms enveloped Alizon, the trap-door flew open, and the figure disappeared with its inanimate burthen.

CHAPTER XIII.

The two familiars.

After seeing Richard depart on his perilous mission to Malkin Tower, Mistress Nutter retired to her own chamber, and held long and anxious self-communion. The course of her thoughts may be gathered from the terrible revelations made by Mother Demdike to Alizon. A prey to the most agonising emotions, it may be questioned if she could have endured greater torment if her heart had been consumed by living fire, as in the punishment assigned to the damned in the fabled halls of Eblis. For the first time, remorse assailed her, and she felt compunction for the evil she had committed. The whole of her dark career passed in review before her. The long catalogue of her crimes unfolded itself like a scroll of flame, and at its foot were written in blazing characters the awful words, JUDGMENT AND CONDEMNATION! There was no escape — none! Hell, with its unquenchable fires and unimaginable horrors, yawned to receive her, and she felt, with anguish and self-reproach not to be described, how wretched a bargain she had made, and how dearly the brief gratification of her evil passions had been purchased at the cost of an eternity of woe and torture.

This change of feeling had been produced by her newly-awakened affection for her daughter, long supposed dead, and now restored to her, only to be snatched away again in a manner which added to the sharpness of the loss. She saw herself the sport of a juggling fiend, whose aim was to win over her daughter's soul through her instrumentality, and she resolved, if possible, to defeat his purposes. This, she was aware, could only be accomplished by her own destruction, but even this dread alternative she was prepared to embrace.

Alizon's sinless nature and devotion to herself had so wrought upon her, that, though she had at first resisted the better impulses kindled within her bosom, in the end they completely overmastered her.

Was it, she asked herself, too late to repent? Was there no way of breaking her compact? She remembered to have read of a young man who had signed away his own soul, being restored to heaven by the intercession of the great reformer of the church, Martin Luther. But, on the other hand, she had heard of many others, who, on the slightest manifestation of penitence, had been rent in pieces by the Fiend. Still the idea recurred to her. Might not her daughter, armed with perfect purity and holiness, with a soul free from stain as an unspotted mirror; might not she, who had avouched herself ready to risk all for her — for she had overheard her declaration to Richard; — might not she be able to work out her salvation? Would confession of her sins and voluntary submission to earthly justice save her? Alas! — no. She was without hope. She had an inexorable master to deal with, who would grant her no grace, except upon conditions she would not assent to.

She would have thrown herself on her knees, but they refused to bend. She would have prayed, but the words turned to blasphemies. She would have wept, but the fountains of tears were dry. The witch could never weep.

Then came despair and frenzy, and, like furies, lashed her with whips of scorpions, goading her with the memory of her abominations and idolatries, and her infinite and varied iniquities. They showed her, as in a swiftly-fleeting vision, all who had suffered wrong by her, or whom her malice had afflicted in body or estate. They mocked her with a glimpse of the paradise she had forfeited. She saw her daughter in a beatified state about to enter its golden portals, and would

have clung to her robes in the hope of being carried in with her, but she was driven away by an angel with a flaming sword, who cried out, "Thou hast adjured heaven, and heaven rejects thee. Satan's brand is upon thy brow, and, unless it be effaced, thou canst never enter here. Down to Tophet, thou witch!" Then she implored her daughter to touch her brow with the tip of her finger; and as the latter was about to comply, a dark demoniacal shape suddenly rose, and, seizing her by the hair, plunged with her down — down — millions of miles — till she beheld a world of fire appear beneath her, consisting of a multitude of volcanoes, roaring and raging like furnaces, boiling over with red-hot lava, and casting forth huge burning stones. In each of these beds of fire thousands upon thousands of sufferers were writhing, and their groans and lamentations arose in one frightful, incessant wail, too terrible for human hearing.

Over this place of torment the demon held her suspended. She shrieked aloud in her agony, and, shaking off the oppression, rejoiced to find the vision had been caused by her own distempered imagination.

Meanwhile, the storm, which had obstructed Richard as he climbed the hill, had come on, though Mistress Nutter had not noticed it; but now a loud peal of thunder shook the room, and rousing herself she walked to the window, The sight she beheld increased her alarm. Heavy thunder-clouds rested upon the hill side, and seemed ready to discharge their artillery upon the course which she knew must be taken by the young man.

The chamber in which she stood, it has been said, was large and gloomy, with a wainscoting of dark oak. On one of the panels was painted a picture of herself in her days of youth, innocence, and beauty; and on another, a portrait of her unfortunate husband, who appeared a handsome young

man, with a stern countenance, attired in a black velvet doublet and cloak, of the fashion of Elizabeth's day. Between these paintings stood a carved oak bedstead, with a high tester and dark heavy drapery, opposite which was a wide window, occupying almost the whole length of the room, but darkened by thick bars and glass, crowded with armorial bearings, or otherwise deeply dyed. The high mantel-piece and its carvings have been previously described, as well as the bloody hearth-stone, where the tragical incident occurred connected with Alizon's early history.

As Mistress Nutter returned to the fire-place, a plaintive cry arose from it, and starting — for the sound revived terrible memories within her breast — she beheld the ineffaceable stains upon the flag traced out by blue phosphoric fire, while above them hovered the shape of a bleeding infant. Horror-stricken, she averted her gaze, but it encountered another object, equally appalling — her husband's portrait; or rather, it would seem, a phantom in its place; for the eyes, lighted up by infernal fire, glared at her from beneath the frowning and contracted brows, while the hand significantly pointed to the hearth-stone, on which the sanguinary stains had now formed themselves into the fatal word "VENGEANCE!"

In a few minutes the fiery characters died away, and the portrait resumed its wonted expression, but ere Mistress Nutter had recovered from her terror the back of the fire-place opened, and a tall swarthy man stepped out from it. As he appeared, a flash of lightning illumined the chamber, and revealed his fiendish countenance. On seeing him, the lady immediately regained her courage, and addressed him in a haughty and commanding tone —

"Why this intrusion? I did not summon thee, and do not require thee."

"You are mistaken, Madam," he replied; "you had never

more occasion for me than at this moment; and so far from intruding upon you, I have avoided coming near you, even though enjoined to do so by my lord. He is perfectly aware of the change which has just taken place in your opinions, and the anxiety you now feel to break the contract you have entered into with him, and which he has scrupulously fulfilled on his part; but he wishes you distinctly to understand, that he has no intention of abandoning his claims upon you, but will most assuredly enforce them at the proper time. I need not remind you that your term draws to a close, and ere many months must expire; but means of extending it have been offered you, if you choose to avail yourself of them."

"I have no such intention," replied Mistress Nutter, in a decided tone.

"So be it, Madam," replied the other; "but you will not preserve your daughter, who is in the hands of a tried and faithful servant of my lord, and what you hesitate to do that servant will perform, and so reap the benefit of the sacrifice."

"Not so," rejoined Mistress Nutter.

"I say yea," retorted the familiar.

"Thou art my slave, I command thee to bring Alizon hither at once."

The familiar shook his head.

"Thou refusest!" cried Mistress Nutter, menacingly. "Know'st thou not I have the means of chastising thee?"

"You had, Madam," replied the other; "but the moment a thought of penitence crossed your breast, the power you were invested with departed. My lord, however, is willing to give you an hour of grace, when, if you voluntarily renew your oaths to him, he will accept them, and place me at your disposal once more; but if you still continue obstinate —"

"He will abandon me," interrupted Mistress Nutter; "I knew it. Fool that I was to trust one who, from the beginning, has been a deceiver."

"You have a short memory, and but little gratitude, Madam, and seem entirely to forget the important favour conferred upon you last night. At your solicitation, the boundaries of your property were changed, and large slips of land filched from another, to be given to you. But if you fail in your duty, you cannot expect this to continue. The boundary-marks will be set up in their old places, and the land restored to its rightful owner."

"I expected as much," observed Mistress Nutter, disdainfully.

"Thus all our pains will be thrown away," pursued the familiar; "and though you may make light of the labour, it is no easy task to change the face of a whole country — to turn streams from their course, move bogs, transplant trees, and shift houses, all of which has been done, and will now have to be undone, because of your inconstancy. I, myself, have been obliged to act as many parts as a poor player to please you, and now you dismiss me at a moment's notice, as if I had played them indifferently, whereas the most fastidious audience would have been ravished with my performance. This morning I was the reeve of the forest, and as such obliged to assume the shape of a rascally attorney. I felt it a degradation, I assure you. Nor was I better pleased when you compelled me to put on the likeness of old Roger Nowell, for, whatever you may think, I am not so entirely destitute of personal vanity as to prefer either of their figures to my own. However, I showed no disinclination to oblige you. You are strangely unreasonable to-day. Is it my lord's fault if your desire of vengeance expires in its fruition — if when you have accomplished an object, you no longer care for it? You ask

for revenge — for power. You have them, and cast them aside like childish baubles!"

"Thy lord is an arch deceiver," rejoined Mistress Nutter; "and cannot perform his promises. They are empty delusions — profitless, unsubstantial as shadows. His power prevails not against any thing holy, as I myself have just now experienced. His money turns to withered leaves; his treasures are dust and ashes. Strong only is he in power of mischief, and even his mischief, like curses, recoils on those who use it. His vengeance is no true vengeance, for it troubles the conscience, and engenders remorse, whereas the servant of heaven heaps coals of fire on the head of his adversary by kindness, and satisfies his own heart."

"You should have thought of all this before you vowed yourself to him," said the familiar; "it is too late to reflect now."

"Perchance not," rejoined Mistress Nutter.

"Beware!" thundered the demon, with a terrible gesture, "any overt act of disobedience, and your limbs shall be scattered over this chamber."

"If I do not dare thee to it, it is not because I fear thee," replied Mistress Nutter, in no way dismayed by the threat. "Thou canst not control my tongue. Thou speakest of the services rendered by thy lord, and I repeat they are like his promises, naught. Show me the witch he has enriched. Of what profit is her worship of the false deity — of what avail the sacrifices she makes at his foul altars? It is ever the same spilling of blood, ever the same working of mischief. The wheels of crime roll on like the car of the Indian idol, crushing all before them. Doth thy master ever help his servants in their need? Doth he not ever abandon them when they are no longer useful, and can win him no more proselytes? Miserable servants, miserable master! Look at the murtherous

Demdike and the malignant Chattox, and examine the means whereby they have prolonged their baleful career. Enormities of all kinds committed, and all their families devoted to the Fiend — all wizards or witches! Look at them, I say. What profit to them is their long service? Are they rich? Are they in possession of unfading youth and beauty? Are they splendidly lodged? Have they all they desire? No! — the one dwells in a solitary turret, and the other in a wretched hovel; and both are miserable creatures, living only on the dole wrung by threats from terrified peasants, and capable of no gratification but such as results from practices of malice."

"Is that nothing?" asked the familiar. "To them it is every thing. They care neither for splendid mansions, nor wealth, nor youth, nor beauty. If they did, they could have them all. They care only for the dread and mysterious power they possess, to be able to fascinate with a glance, to transfix by a gesture, to inflict strange ailments by a word, and to kill by a curse. This is the privilege they seek, and this privilege they enjoy."

"And what is the end of it all?" demanded Mistress Nutter, sternly. "Ere long, they will be unable to furnish victims to their insatiate master, who will then abandon them. Their bodies will go to the hangman, their souls to endless bale!"

The familiar laughed as if a good joke had been repeated to him, and rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Very true," he said, "very true. You have stated the case exactly, Madam. Such will certainly be the course of events. But what of that? The old hags will have enjoyed a long term — much longer than might have been anticipated. Mother Demdike, however, as I have intimated, will extend hers, and it is fortunate for her she is enabled to do so, as it

would otherwise expire an hour after midnight, and could not be renewed."

"Thou liest!" cried Mistress Nutter — "liest like thy lord, who is the father of lies. My innocent child can never be offered up at his impious shrine. I have no fear for her. Neither he, nor Mother Demdike, nor any of the accursed sisterhood, can harm her. Her goodness will cover her like armour, which no evil can penetrate. Let him wreak his vengeance, if he will, on me. Let him treat me as a slave who has cast off his yoke. Let him abridge the scanty time allotted me, and bear me hence to his burning kingdom; but injure my child, he cannot — shall not!"

"Go to Malkin Tower at midnight, and thou wilt see," replied the familiar, with a mocking laugh.

"I will go there, but it shall be to deliver her," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "And now, get thee gone. I need thee no more."

"Be not deceived, proud woman," said the familiar. "Once dismissed, I may not be recalled, while thou wilt be wholly unable to defend thyself against thy enemies."

"I care not," she rejoined, "begone!"

The familiar stepped back, and stamping upon the hearthstone, it sank like a trap-door, and he disappeared beneath it, a flash of lightning playing round his dusky figure.

Notwithstanding her vaunted resolution, and the boldness with which she had comported herself before the familiar, Mistress Nutter now completely gave way, and for awhile abandoned herself to despair. Aroused at length by the absolute necessity of action, she again walked to the window and looked forth. The storm still raged furiously without — so furiously, indeed, that it would be madness to brave it, now that she was deprived of her power, and reduced to the ordinary level of humanity. Its very violence, however, assured

her it must soon cease, and she would then set out for Malkin Tower. But what chance had she now in a struggle with the old hag, with all the energies of hell at her command? — what hope was there of her being able to effect her daughter's liberation? No matter, however desperate, the attempt should be made. Meanwhile, it would be necessary to see what was going on below, and ascertain whether Blackadder had returned with Parson Holden. With this view, she descended to the hall, where she found Nicholas Assheton fast asleep in a great arm-chair, and rocked, rather than disturbed, by the loud concussions of thunder. The squire was, no doubt, overcome by the fatigues of the day, or it might be by the potency of the wine he had swallowed, for an empty flask stood on the table beside him. Mistress Nutter did not awaken him, but proceeded to the chamber where she had left Nowell and Potts prisoners, both of whom rose on her entrance.

"Be seated, gentlemen, I pray you," she said, courteously. "I am come to see if you need any thing; for, when this fearful storm abates, I am going forth for a short time."

"Indeed, Madam," replied Potts. "For myself I require nothing further, but perhaps another bottle of wine might be agreeable to my honoured and singular good client."

"Speak for yourself, Sir," cried Roger Nowell, sharply.

"You shall have it," interposed Mistress Nutter. "I shall be glad of a word with you before I go, Master Nowell. I am sorry this dispute has arisen between us."

"Humph!" exclaimed the magistrate.

"Very sorry," pursued Mistress Nutter, "and I wish to make every reparation in my power."

"Reparation, Madam!" cried Nowell. "Give back the land you have stolen from me — restore the boundary lines — sign the deed in Sir Ralph's possession — that is the only reparation you can make."

"I will," replied Mistress Nutter.

"You will!" exclaimed Nowell. "Then the fellow did not deceive us, Master Potts."

"Has any one been with you?" asked the lady, uneasily.

"Ay, the reeve of the forest," replied Nowell. "He told us you would be with us presently, and would make fair offers to us."

"And he told us also *why* you would make them, Madam," added Potts, in an insolent and menacing tone; "he told us you would make a merit of doing what you could not help — that your power had gone from you — that your works of darkness would be destroyed — and that, in a word, you were abandoned by the devil, your master."

"He deceived you," replied Mistress Nutter. "I have made you the offer out of pure good will, and you can reject it or not as you please. All I stipulate, if you do accept it, is that you pledge me your word not to bring any charge of witchcraft against me."

"Do not give the pledge," whispered a voice in the ear of the magistrate.

"Did you speak?" he said, turning to Potts.

"No, Sir," replied the attorney, in a low tone, "but I thought you cautioned me against —"

"Hush!" interrupted Nowell, "it must be the reeve. We cannot comply with your request, Madam," he added, aloud.

"Certainly not," said Potts. "We can make no bargain with an avowed witch. We should gain nothing by it; on the contrary, we should be losers, for we have the positive assurance of a gentleman whom we believe to be upon terms of intimacy with a certain black gentleman of your acquaintance, Madam, that the latter has given you up entirely, and that law and justice may, therefore, take their course. We protest against our unlawful detention; but we give ourselves small

concern about it, as Sir Ralph Assheton, who will be advised of our situation by Parson Holden, will speedily come to our liberation."

"Yes, we are now quite easy on that score, Madam," added Nowell; "and to-morrow we shall have the pleasure of escorting you to Lancaster Castle."

"And your trial will come on at the next assizes, about the middle of August," said Potts. "You have only four months to run."

"That is, indeed, my term," muttered the lady. "I shall not tarry to listen to your taunts," she added, aloud. "You may possibly regret rejecting my proposal."

So saying, she quitted the room.

As she returned to the hall, Nicholas awoke.

"What a devil of a storm!" he exclaimed, stretching himself, and rubbing his eyes. "Zounds! that flash of lightning was enough to blind me, and the thunder well nigh splits one's ears."

"Yet you have slept through louder peals, Nicholas," said Mistress Nutter, coming up to him. "Richard has not returned from his mission, and I must go myself to Malkin Tower. In my absence, I must intrust you with the defence of my house."

"I am willing to undertake it," replied Nicholas, "provided no witchcraft be used."

"Nay, you need not fear that," said the lady, with a forced smile.

"Well then, leave it to me," said the squire, "but you will not set out till the storm is over?"

"I must," replied Mistress Nutter; "there seems no likelihood of its cessation, and each moment is fraught with peril to Alizon. If aught happens to me, Nicholas — if I should — whatever mischance may befal me — promise me you will stand by her."

The squire gave the required promise.

"Enough, I hold you to your word," said Mistress Nutter. "Take this parchment. It is a deed of gift assigning this mansion and all my estates to her. Under certain circumstances you will produce it."

"What circumstances? I am at a loos to understand you, Madam," said the squire.

"Do not question me further, but take especial care of the deed, and produce it, as I have said, at the fitting moment. You will know when that arrives. Ha! I am wanted."

The latter exclamation had been occasioned by the appearance of an old woman at the further end of the hall, beckoning to her. On seeing her, Mistress Nutter immediately quitted the squire, and followed her into a small chamber opening from this part of the hall, and into which she retreated.

"What brings you here, Mother Chattox?" exclaimed the lady, closing the door.

"Can you not guess?" replied the hag. "I am come to help you, not for any love I bear you, but to avenge myself on old Demdike. Do not interrupt me. My familiar, Fancy, has told me all. I know how you are circumstanced. I know Alizon is in old Demdike's clutches, and you are unable to extricate her. But I can, and will; because if the hateful old hag fails in offering up her sacrifice before the first hour of day, her term will be out, and I shall be rid of her, and reign in her stead. To-morrow she will be on her way to Lancaster Castle. Ha! ha! The dungeon is prepared for her — the stake driven into the ground — the fagots heaped around it. The torch has only to be lighted. Ho! Ho!"

"Shall we go to Malkin Tower?" asked Mistress Nutter, shuddering.

"No; to the summit of Pendle Hill," rejoined Mother

Chattox; "for there the girl will be taken, and there only can we secure her. But first we must proceed to my hut, and make some preparations. I have three scalps and eight teeth, taken from a grave in Goldshaw church-yard this very day. We can make a charm with them."

"You must prepare it alone," said Mistress Nutter; "I can have nought to do with it."

"True — true — I had forgotten," cried the hag, with a chuckling laugh — "you are no longer one of us. Well, then, I will do it alone. But come with me. You will not object to mount upon my broomstick. It is the only safe conveyance in this storm of the devil's raising. Come — away!"

And she threw open the window and sprang forth, followed by Mistress Nutter.

Through the murky air, and borne as if on the wings of the wind, two dark forms are flying swiftly. Over the tops of the tempest-shaken trees they go, and as they gain the skirts of the thicket an oak beneath is shivered by a thunderbolt. They hear the fearful crash, and see the splinters fly far and wide; and the foremost of the two, who, with her skinny arm extended, seems to direct their course, utters a wild scream of laughter, while a raven, speeding on broad black wing before them, croaks hoarsely. Now the torrent rages below, and they see its white waters tumbling over a ledge of rock; now they pass over the brow of a hill; now skim over a dreary waste and dangerous morass. Fearful it is to behold those two flying figures as the lightning shows them bestriding their fantastical steed; the one an old hag with hideous lineaments and distorted person, and the other a proud dame, still beautiful, though no longer young, pale as death, and her loose jetty hair streaming like a meteor in the breeze.

The ride is over, and they alight near the door of a solitary hovel. The raven has preceded them, and, perched on the chimney top, flies down it as they enter, and greets them with hoarse croaking. The inside of the hut corresponds with its miserable exterior, consisting only of two rooms, in one of which is a wretched pallet; in the other are a couple of large chests, a crazy table, a bench, a three-legged stool, and a spinning-wheel. A cauldron is suspended above a peat fire, smouldering on the hearth. There is only one window, and a thick curtain is drawn across it, to secure the inmate of the hut from prying eyes.

Mother Chattox closes and bars the door, and, motioning Mistress Nutter to seat herself upon the stool, kneels down near the hearth, and blows the turf into a flame, the raven helping her, by flapping his big black wings, and uttering a variety of strange sounds, as the sparks fly about. Heaping on more turf, and shifting the cauldron, so that it may receive the full influence of the flame, the hag proceeds to one of the chests, and takes out sundry small matters, which she places one by one with great care on the table. The raven has now fixed his great talons on her shoulder, and chuckles and croaks in her ear as she pursues her occupation. Suddenly a piece of bone attracts his attention, and, darting out his beak, he seizes it, and hops away.

"Give me that scalp, thou mischievous imp!" cries the hag, "I need it for the charm I am about to prepare. Give it me, I say."

But the raven still held it fast, and hopped here and there so nimbly that she was unable to catch him. At length, when he had exhausted her patience, he alighted on Mistress Nutter's shoulder, and dropped it into her lap. Engrossed by her own painful thoughts, the lady had paid no attention to what was passing, and she shuddered as she took up the frag-

ment of mortality, and placed it upon the table. A few tufts of hair, the texture of which showed they had belonged to a female, still adhered to the scalp. Mistress Nutter regarded it fixedly, and with an interest for which she could not account.

After sharply chiding the raven, Mother Chattox put forth her hand to grasp the prize she had been robbed of, when Mistress Nutter checked her by observing, "You said you got this scalp from Goldshaw church-yard. Know you aught concerning it?"

"Ay, a good deal," replied the old woman, chuckling. "It comes from a grave near the yew tree, and not far from Abbot Cliderhow's cross. Old Zachariah Worms, the sexton, digged it up for me. That yellow skull had once a fair face attached to it, and those few dull tufts were once bright flowing tresses. She who owned them died young; bnt young as she was, she survived all her beauty. Hollow cheeks and hollow eyes, wasted flesh, and cruel cough were hers—and she pined and pined away. Folks said she was forespoken, and that I had done it. I, forsooth! She had never done me harm. You know whether I was rightly accused, Madam."

"Take it away," cried Mistress Nutter, hurriedly, and as if struggling against some overmastering feeling. "I cannot bear to look at it. I wanted not this horrible reminder of my crimes."

"This was the reason, then, why Ralph stole the scalp from me," muttered the hag, as she threw it, together with some other matters, into the cauldron. "He wanted to show you his sagacity. I might have guessed as much."

"I will go into the other room while you make your preparations," said Mistress Nutter, rising; "the sight of them disturbs me. You can summon me when you are ready."

"I will, Madam," replied the old hag, "and you must

control your impatience, for the spell requires time for its confection."

Mistress Nutter made no reply, but, walking into the inner room, closed the door, and threw herself upon the pallet. Here, despite her anxiety, sleep stole upon her, and though her dreams were troubled, she did not awake till Mother Chattox stood beside her.

"Have I slept long?" she inquired.

"More than three hours," replied the hag.

"Three hours!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter. "Why did you not wake me before? You would have saved me from terrible dreams. We are not too late?"

"No, no," replied Mother Chattox; "there is plenty of time. Come into the other room. All is ready."

As Mistress Nutter followed the old hag into the adjoining room, a strong odour, arising from a chafing-dish, in which herbs, roots, and other ingredients were burning, assailed her, and, versed in all weird ceremonials, she knew that a powerful suffumigation had been made, though with what intent she had yet to learn. The scanty furniture had been cleared away, and a circle was described on the clay floor by skulls and bones, alternated by dried toads, adders, and other reptiles. In the midst of this magical circle the cauldron, which had been brought from the chimney, was placed, and, the lid being removed, a thick vapour arose from it. Mistress Nutter looked around for the raven, but the bird was nowhere to be seen, nor did any other living thing appear to be present besides themselves.

Taking the lady's hand, Mother Chattox drew her into the circle, and began to mutter a spell; after which, still maintaining her hold of her companion, she bade her look into the cauldron, and declare what she saw.

"I see nothing," replied the lady, after she had gazed upon

the bubbling waters for a few moments. "Ah! yes—I discern certain figures, but they are confused by the steam, and broken by the agitation of the water."

"Cauldron! cease boiling! and smoke! disperse!" cried Mother Chattox, stamping her foot. "Now can you see more plainly?"

"I can," replied Mistress Nutter; "I behold the subterranean chamber beneath Malkin Tower, with its nine ponderous columns, its altar in the midst of them, its demon image, and the well with waters black as Lethe beside it."

"The water within the cauldron came from that well," said Mother Chattox, with a chuckling laugh; "my familiar risked his liberty to bring it, but he succeeded. Ha! ha! My precious Fancy, thou art the best of servants, and shalt have my best blood to reward thee to-morrow — thou shalt, my sweetheart, my chuck, my dandyprat. But hie thee back to Malkin Tower, and contrive that this lady may hear, as well as see, all that passes. Away!"

Mistress Nutter concluded that the injunction would be obeyed, but as the familiar was invisible to her, she could not detect his departure.

"Do you see no one within the dungeon?" inquired Mother Chattox.

"Ah! yes," exclaimed the lady; "I have at last discovered Alizon. She was behind one of the pillars. A little girl is with her. It is Jennet Device, and from the spiteful looks of the latter, I judge she is mocking her. Oh! what malice lurks in the breast of that hateful child. She is a true descendant of Mother Demdike. But Alizon — sweet, patient Alizon — she seems to bear all her taunts with a meekness and resignation enough to move the hardest heart. I would weep for her if I could. And now Jennet shakes her hand at her, and leaves her. She is alone. What will she do now? Has she no

thoughts of escape? Oh, yes! She looks about her distractedly — runs round the vault — tries the door of every cell — they are all bolted and barred — there is no outlet — none!"

"What next?" inquired the hag.

"She shrieks aloud," rejoined Mistress Nutter, "and the cry thrills through every fibre in my frame. She calls upon me for aid — upon me, her mother, and little thinks I hear her, and am unable to help her. Oh! it is horrible. Take me to her, good Chattox — take me to her, I implore you."

"Impossible!" replied the hag; "you must await the fitting time. If you cannot control yourself I shall remove the cauldron."

"Oh! no, no," cried the distracted lady. "I will be calm. Ah! what is this I see?" she added, belying her former words by sudden vehemence, while rage and astonishment were depicted upon her countenance. "What infernal delusion is practised upon my child! This is monstrous — intolerable. Oh! that I could undeceive her — could warn her of the snare!"

"What is the nature of the delusion?" asked Mother Chattox, with some curiosity. "I am so blind I cannot see the figures on the water."

"It is an evil spirit in my likeness," replied Mistress Nutter.

"In your likeness!" exclaimed the hag. "A cunning device — and worthy of old Demdike — ho! ho!"

"I can scarce bear to look on," cried Mistress Nutter, "but I must, though it tears my heart in pieces to witness such cruelty. The poor girl has rushed to her false parent — has thrown her arms around her, and is weeping on her shoulder. Oh! it is a maddening sight. But it is nothing to what follows. The temptress, with the subtlety of the old serpent, is pouring lies into her ear, telling her they both are captives, and both

will perish unless she consents to purchase their deliverance at the price of her soul, and she offers her a bond to sign — such a bond as, alas! thou and I, Chattox, have signed. But Alizon rejects it with horror, and gazes at her false mother as if she suspected the delusion. But the temptress is not to be beaten thus. She renews her entreaties, casts herself on the ground, and clasps my child's knees in humblest supplication. Oh! that Alizon would place her foot upon her neck and crush her. But it is not so the good act. She raises her, and tells her she will willingly die for her, but her soul was given to her by her Creator, and must be returned to him. Oh! that I had thought of this."

"And what answer makes the spirit?" asked the witch.

"It laughs derisively," replied Mistress Nutter; "and proceeds to use all those sophistical arguments, which we have so often heard, to pervert her mind, and overthrow her principles. But Alizon is proof against them all. Religion and virtue support her, and make her more than a match for her opponent. Equally vain are the spirit's attempts to seduce her by the offer of a life of sinful enjoyment. She rejects it with angry scorn. Failing in argument and entreaty, the spirit now endeavours to work upon her fears, and paints, in appalling colours, the tortures she will have to endure, contrasting them with the delight she is voluntarily abandoning, with the lover she might espouse, with the high worldly position she might fill. 'What are worldly joys and honours compared with those of heaven?' exclaims Alizon; 'I would not exchange them.' The spirit then, in a vision, shows her her lover, Richard, and asks her if she can resist his entreaties. The trial is very sore, as she gazes on that beloved form, seeming, by its passionate gestures, to implore her to assent, but she is firm, and the vision disappears. The ordeal is now over. Alizon has triumphed over all their arts. The spirit in my likeness resumes

its fiendish shape, and with a dreadful menace against the poor girl, vanishes from her sight."

"Mother Demdike has not done with her yet," observed Chattox.

"You are right," replied Mistress Nutter. "The old hag descends the staircase leading to the vault, and approaches the miserable captive. With her there are no supplications — no arguments — but commands and terrible threats. She is as unsuccessful as her envoy. Alizon has gained courage, and defies her."

"Ha! does she so?" exclaimed Mother Chattox. "I am glad of it."

"The solid floor resounds with the stamping of the enraged witch," pursued Mistress Nutter. "She tells Alizon she will take her to Pendle Hill at midnight, and there offer her up as a sacrifice to the Fiend. My child replies that she trusts for her deliverance to Heaven — that her body may be destroyed — that her soul cannot be harmed. Scarcely are the words uttered than a terrible clangour is heard. The walls of the dungeon seem breaking down, and the ponderous columns reel. The demon statue rises on its throne, and a stream of flame issues from its brow. The doors of the cells burst open, and with the clanking of chains, and other dismal noises, skeleton shapes stalk forth from them, each with a pale blue light above its head. Monstrous beasts, like tiger cats, with rough black skins and flaming eyes, are moving about, and looking as if they would spring upon the captive. Two gravestones are now pushed aside, and from the cold earth arise the forms of Blackburn, the robber, and his paramour, the dissolute Isole de Heton. She joins the grisly throng now approaching the distracted girl, who falls insensible to the ground."

"Can you see aught more?" asked the hag, as Mistress Nutter still bent eagerly over the cauldron.

"No; the whole chamber is buried in darkness," replied the lady; "I can see nothing of my poor child. What will become of her?"

"I will question Fancy," replied the hag, throwing some fresh ingredients into the chafing-dish; and as the smoke arose, she vociferated, "Come hither, Fancy; I want thee, my fondling, my sweet. Come quickly! ha! thou art here."

The familiar was still invisible to Mistress Nutter, but a slight sound made her aware of his presence.

"And now, my sweet Fancy," pursued the hag, "tell us, if thou canst, what will be done with Alizon, and what course we must pursue to free her from old Demdike?"

"At present she is in a state of insensibility," replied a harsh voice, "and she will be kept in that condition till she is conveyed to the summit of Pendle Hill. I have already told you it is useless to attempt to take her from Malkin Tower. It is too well guarded. Your only chance will be to interrupt the sacrifice."

"But how, my sweet Fancy? how, my little darling?" inquired the hag.

"It is a perplexing question," replied the voice, "for by showing you how to obtain possession of the girl I disobey my lord."

"Ay, but you serve me — you please me, my pretty Fancy," cried the hag. "You shall quaff your fill of blood on the morrow, if you do this for me. I want to get rid of my old enemy — to catch her in her own toils — to send her to a dungeon — to burn her — ha! ha! You must help me, my little sweetheart."

"I will do all I can," replied the voice, "but Mother Demdike is cunning and powerful, and high in favour with my lord.

You must have mortal aid as well as mine. The officers of justice must be there to seize her at the moment when the victim is snatched from her, or she will baffle all your schemes."

"And how shall we accomplish this?" asked Mother Chattox.

"I will tell you," said Mistress Nutter to the hag. "Let him put on the form of Richard Assheton, and in that guise hasten to Rough Lee, where he will find the young man's cousin Nicholas, to whom he must make known the dreadful deed about to be enacted on Pendle Hill. Nicholas will at once engage to interrupt it. He can arm himself with the weapons of justice by taking with him Roger Nowell, the magistrate, and his myrmidon, Potts, the attorney, both of whom are detained prisoners in the house by my orders."

"The scheme promises well, and shall be adopted," replied the hag; "but suppose Richard himself should appear first on the scene. Dost know where he is, my sweet Fancy?"

"When I last saw him," replied the voice, "he was lying, senseless, on the ground, at the foot of Malkin Tower, having been precipitated from the doorway by Mother Demdike. You need apprehend no interference from him."

"It is well," replied Mother Chattox. "Then take his form, my pet, though it is not half as handsome as thy own."

"A black skin, and goat-like limbs are to thy taste, I know," replied the familiar, with a laugh.

"Let me look upon him before he goes, that I may be sure the likeness is exact," said Mistress Nutter.

"Thou hearest, Fancy! Become visible to her," cried the hag.

And as she spoke, a figure in all respects resembling Richard stood before them.

"What think you of him? Will he do?" said Mother Chattox.

"Ay," replied the lady, "and now send him off at once. There is no time to lose "

"I shall be there in the twinkling of an eye," said the familiar; "but I own I like not the task."

"There is no help for it, my sweet Fancy," cried the hag. "I cannot forego my triumph over old Demdike. Now away with thee, and when thou hast executed thy mission, return and tell us how thou hast sped in the matter."

The familiar promised obedience to her commands, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

How Rough Lee was again besieged,

PARSON HOLDEN, it will be remembered, left Rough Lee, charged by Potts with a message to Sir Ralph Assheton, informing him of his detention, and that of Roger Nowell, by Mistress Nutter, and imploring him to come to their assistance without delay. Congratulating himself on his escape, but apprehensive of pursuit, the worthy rector, who, as a keen huntsman, was extremely well mounted, made the best of his way, and had already passed the gloomy gorge through which Pendle Water swept, had climbed the hill beyond it, and was crossing the moor, now alone lying between him and Goldshaw, when he heard a shout behind him, and, turning at the sound, beheld Blackadder and another mounted serving-man issuing from a thicket, and spurring furiously after him. Relying upon the speed of his horse, he disregarded their cries, and accelerated his pace; but, in spite of this, his pursuers gained upon him rapidly.

While debating the question of resistance or surrender,

the rector descried Bess Whitaker coming towards him from the opposite direction — a circumstance that greatly rejoiced him; for, aware of her strength and courage, he felt sure he could place as much dependence upon her in this emergency as on any man in the county. Bess was riding a stout, rough-looking nag, apparently well able to sustain her weight, and carried the redoubtable horsewhip with her.

On the other hand, Holden had been recognised by Bess, who came up just as he was overtaken and seized by his assailants, one of whom caught hold of his cassock, and tore it from his back, while the other, seizing hold of his bridle, endeavoured, in spite of his efforts to the contrary, to turn his horse round. Many oaths, threats, and blows were exchanged during the scuffle, which no doubt would have terminated in the rector's defeat, and his compulsory return to Rough Lee, had it not been for the opportune arrival of Bess, who, swearing as lustily as the serving-men, and, brandishing the horsewhip, dashed into the scene of action, and with a few well-applied cuts liberated the divine. Enraged at her interference, and smarting from the application of the whip, Blackadder drew a petronel from his girdle, and levelled it at her head; but ere he could discharge it, the weapon was stricken from his grasp, and a second blow on the head from the butt-end of the whip felled him from his horse. Seeing the fate of his companion, the other serving-man fled, leaving Bess mistress of the field.

The rector thanked her heartily for the service she had rendered him, and complimented her on her prowess.

"Ey'n neaw dun mitch to boast on i' leatherin' them two seawr-feaced rapscallions," said Bess, with becoming modesty. "Simon Blackadder an ey ha' had mony a tussle together efore this, fo he 's a feaw tempert felly, an canna drink abowt fightin', boh he has awlus found me more nor his match. Boh

save us, your reverence, what were the ill-favort gullions ridin' after ye for? Firrups tak 'em! they didna mean to rob ye, surely."

"Their object was to make me prisoner, and carry me back to Rough Lee, Bess," replied Holden. "They wished to prevent my going to Whalley, whither I am bound, to procure help from Sir Ralph Assheton to liberate Master Roger Nowell and his attorney, who are forcibly detained by Mistress Nutter."

"Yo may spare yer horse an yersel the jorney, then, reverend Sir," replied Bess; "for yo'n foind Sir Tummus Metcawfe, wi' some twanty or throtty followers, armed wi' bills, hawberts, petronels, and calivers, at Goldshaw, an they win go wi' ye at wanst ey'm sartin. Ey heerd sum o' t' chaps say os ow Sir Tummus is goin' to tak' possession o' Mistress Robinson's house, Raydale Ha', i' Wensley Dale, boh nah doubt he'n go furst wi' yer rev'rence, 'specially as he bears Mistress Nutter a grudge."

"At all events, I will ask him," said Holden. "Are he and his followers lodged at your house, Bess?"

"Yeigh," replied the hostess, "some on 'en are i' th' house, some i' th' barn, an some i' th' stables. The place is awtogether owerrun wi' 'em. Ey wur so moydert an wurrotit wi' their ca'in an bawlin fo' ele an drink, that ey swore they shouldna ha' another drawp wi' my consent, an to be os good os my word, ey clapt key o' t' cellar i' my pocket, an leavin' our Margit to answer 'em, ey set out os yo see, intendin' to go os far os t' mill, an comfort poor deeavely Ruchot Baldwyn in his trouble."

"A most praiseworthy resolution, Bess," said the rector, "but what is to be done with this fellow?" he added, pointing to Blackadder, who, though badly hurt, was trying to creep

towards the petronel, which was lying at a little distance from him on the ground.

Perceiving his intention, Bess quickly dismounted, and possessing herself of the weapon, stepped aside, and slipping off one of the bands that confined the hose on her well-shaped leg, grasped the wounded man by the shoulders, and with great expedition tied his hands behind his back. She then lifted him up with as much ease as if he had been an infant, and set him upon his horse, with his face towards the tail. This done, she gave the bridle to the rector, and handing him the petronel at the same time, told him to take care of his prisoner, for she must pursue her journey. And with this, in spite of his renewed entreaties that she would go back with him, she sprang on her horse, and rode off.

On arriving at Goldshaw with his prisoner, the rector at once proceeded to the hostel, in front of which he found several of the villagers assembled, attracted by the numerous company within doors, whose shouts and laughter could be heard at a considerable distance. Holden's appearance with Blackadder occasioned considerable surprise, and all eagerly gathered round him to learn what had occurred; but, without satisfying their curiosity beyond telling them he had been attacked by the prisoner, he left him in their custody, and entered the house, where he found all the benches in the principal room occupied by a crew of half-drunken roysterers, with flagons of ale before them; for, after Bess's departure with the key, they had broken into the cellar, and, broaching a cask, helped themselves to its contents. Various weapons were scattered about the tables, or reared against the walls, and the whole scene looked like a carouse by a band of marauders. Little respect was shown the rector, and he was saluted by many a ribald jest as he pushed his way towards the inner room.

Sir Thomas was drinking with a couple of desperadoes, whose long rapiers and tarnished military equipments seemed to announce that they had, at some time or other, belonged to the army, though their ruffianly looks and braggadocio air and discourse, strongly seasoned with oaths and slang, made it evident that they were now little better than Alsatian bullies. They had, in fact, been hired by Sir Thomas for the expedition on which he was bent, as he could find no one in the country upon whom he could so well count as on them. Eyeing the rector fiercely as he intruded upon their privacy, they glanced at their leader to ask whether they should turn him out, but, receiving no encouragement for such rudeness, they contented themselves with scowling at him from beneath their bent brows, twisting up their shaggy moustachios, and trifling with the hilts of their rapiers. Holden opened his business at once; and as soon as Sir Thomas heard it, he sprang to his feet, and, swearing a great oath, declared he would storm Rough Lee, and burn it to the ground, if Mistress Nutter did not set the two captives free.

"As to the audacious witch herself, I will carry her off, in spite of the devil her master!" he cried. "How say you, Captain Gauntlet — and you, too, Captain Storks, is not this an expedition to your tastes — ha?"

The two worthies appealed to responded joyously that it was so; and it was then agreed that Blackadder should be brought in and interrogated, as some important information might be obtained from him. Upon this, Captain Gauntlet left the room to fetch him, and presently afterwards returned dragging in the prisoner, who looked dogged and angry, by the shoulders.

"Harkye, fellow," said Sir Thomas, sternly, "if you do not answer the questions I shall put to you truly and satisfactorily, I will have you taken out into the yard, and shot like a

dog. Thus much premised, I shall proceed with my examination. Master Roger Nowell and Master Thomas Potts, you are aware, are unlawfully detained prisoners by Mistress Alice Nutter. Now, I have been called upon by the reverend gentleman here to undertake their liberation, but, before doing so, I desire to know from you what defensive and offensive preparations your mistress has made, and whether you judge it likely she will attempt to hold out her house against us?"

"Most assuredly she will," replied Blackadder, "and against twice your force. Rough Lee is as strong as a castle; and as those within it are well-armed, vigilant, and of good courage, there is little fear of its capture. If your worship should propose terms to my mistress for the release of her prisoners, she may, possibly, assent to them; but if you approach her in hostile fashion, and demand their liberation, I am well assured she will resist you, and well assured, also, she will resist you effectually."

"I shall approach her in no other sort than that of an enemy," rejoined Sir Thomas, "but thou art over-confident, knave. Unless thy mistress have a legion of devils at her back, and they hold us in check, we will force a way into her dwelling. Fire and fury! dost presume to laugh at me, fellow? Take him hence, and let him be soundly cudgelled for his insolence, Gauntlet."

"Pardon me, your worship," cried Blackadder, "I only smiled at the strange notions you entertain of my mistress."

"Why, dost mean to deny that she is a witch?" demanded Metcalfe.

"Nay, if your worship will have it so, it is not for me to contradict you," replied Blackadder.

"But I ask thee is she not a servant of Satan? — dost thou not know it? — canst thou not prove it?" cried the knight. "Shall we put him to the torture to make him confess?"

"Ay, tie his thumbs together till the blood burst forth, Sir Thomas," said Gauntlet.

"Or hang him up to yon beam by the heels," suggested Captain Storks.

"On no account," interposed Holden. "I did not bring him hither to be dealt with in this way, and I will not permit it. If torture is to be administered it must be by the hands of justice, into which I require him to be delivered; and then if he can testify aught against his mistress, he will be made to do it."

"Torture shall never wring a word from me, whether wrongfully or rightfully applied," said Blackadder, doggedly; "though I could tell much if I chose. Now give heed to me, Sir Thomas. You will never take Rough Lee, still less its mistress, without my help."

"What are thy terms, knave?" exclaimed the knight, pondering upon the offer. "And take heed thou triflest not with me, or I will have thee flogged within an inch of thy life, in spite of parson or justice. What are thy terms, I repeat?"

"They are for your worship's ear alone," replied Blackadder.

"Beware what you do, Sir Thomas," interposed Holden. "I hold it my duty to tell you you are compromising justice in listening to the base proposals of this man, who, while offering to betray his mistress, will assuredly deceive you. You will equally deceive him in feigning to agree to terms which you cannot fulfil."

"Cannot fulfil!" ejaculated the knight, highly offended; "I would have you to know, Sir, that Sir Thomas Metcalfe's word is his bond, and that whatsoever he promises he *will* fulfil, in spite of the devil! Body o' me! but for the respect I owe your cloth, I would give you a very different answer,

reverend Sir. But since you have chosen to thrust yourself unasked into the affair, I take leave to say that I *will* hear this knave's proposals, and judge for myself of the expediency of acceding to them. I must pray you, therefore, to withdraw. Nay, if you will not go hence peaceably, you shall perforce. Take him away, gentlemen."

Thus enjoined, the Alsatian captains took each an arm of the rector, and forced him out of the room, leaving Sir Thomas alone with the prisoner. Greatly incensed at the treatment he had experienced, Holden instantly quitted the house, hastened to the rectory, which adjoined the church, and having given some messages to his household, rode off to Whalley, with the intention of acquainting Sir Ralph Assheton with all that had occurred.

Sir Thomas Metcalfe remained closeted with the prisoner for a few minutes, and then coming forth issued orders that all should get ready to start for Rough Lee without delay; whereupon each man emptied his flagon, pocketed the dice he had been cogging, pushed aside the shuffle-board, left the loggats on the clay floor of the barn, and, grasping his weapon — halbert, or caliver, as it might be — prepared to attend his leader. Sir Thomas did not relate, even to the Alsatian captains, what had passed between him and Blackadder; but it did not appear that he placed entire confidence in the latter; for though he caused his hands to be unbound, and allowed him, in consideration of his wounded state, to ride, he secretly directed Gauntlet and Storks to keep near him, and shoot him through the head if he attempted to escape. Both these personages were provided with horses as well as their leader, but all the rest of the party were on foot. Metcalfe made some inquiries after the rector, but finding he was gone, he did not concern himself further about him. Before starting, the knight, who with all his recklessness, had a

certain sense of honesty, called the girl who had been left in charge of the hostel by Bess, and gave her a sum amply sufficient to cover all the excesses of his men, adding a handsome gratuity to herself.

The first part of the journey was accomplished without mischance, and the party bade fair to arrive at the end of it in safety; but as they entered the gorge, at the extremity of which Rough Lee was situated, a terrific storm burst upon them, compelling them to seek shelter in the mill, from which they were luckily not far distant at the time. The house was completely deserted, but they were well able to shift for themselves, and not over scrupulous in the manner of doing so, and as the remains of the funeral feast were not removed from the table, some of the company sat down to them, while others found their way to the cellar.

The storm was of long continuance, much longer than was agreeable to Sir Thomas, and he paced the room to and fro impatiently, ever and anon walking to the window or door, to see whether it had in any degree abated, and was constantly doomed to disappointment. Instead of diminishing, it increased in violence, and it was now impossible to quit the house with safety. The lightning blazed, the thunder rattled among the overhanging rocks, and the swollen stream of Pendle Water roared at their feet. Blackadder was left under the care of the two Alsatians, but while they had shielded their eyes from the glare of the lightning, he threw open the window, and, springing through it, made good his retreat. In such a storm it was vain to follow him, even if they had dared to attempt it.

In vain Sir Thomas Metcalfe fumed and fretted — in vain he heaped curses upon the bullies for their negligence — in vain he hurled menaces after the fugitive: the former paid little heed to his imprecations, and the latter was beyond his

reach. The notion began to gain ground amongst the rest of the troop that the storm was the work of witchcraft, and occasioned general consternation. Even the knight's anger yielded to superstitious fear, and as a terrific explosion shook the rafters overhead, and threatened to bring them down upon him, he fell on his knees, and essayed, with unaccustomed lips, to murmur a prayer. But he was interrupted; for amid the deep silence succeeding the awful crash, a mocking laugh was heard, and the villanous countenance of Blackadder, rendered doubly hideous by the white lightning, was seen at the casement. The sight restored Sir Thomas at once. Drawing his sword he flew to the window, but before he could reach it Blackadder wos gone. The next flash showed what had befallen him. In stepping backwards, he tumbled into the mill-race; and the current, increased in depth and force by the deluging rain, instantly swept him away.

Half an hour after this, the violence of the storm had perceptibly diminished, and Sir Thomas and his companions began to hope that their speedy release was at hand. Latterly the knight had abandoned all idea of attacking Rough Lee, but with the prospect of fair weather his courage returned, and he once more resolved to attempt it. He was moving about among his followers, striving to dispel their fears, and persuade them that the tempest was only the result of natural causes, when the door was suddenly thrown open, giving entrance to Bess Whitaker, who bore the miller in her arms. She stared on seeing the party assembled, and knit her brows, but said nothing till she had deposited Baldwyn in a seat, when she observed to Sir Thomas that he seemed to have little scruple in taking possession of a house in its owner's absence. The knight excused himself for the intrusion by saying he had been compelled by the storm to take refuge

there with his followers; a plea readily admitted by Baldwyn, who was now able to speak for himself; and the miller next explained that he had been to Rough Lee, and after many perilous adventures, into the particulars of which he did not enter, had been brought away by Bess, who had carried him home. That home he now felt would be a lonely and insecure one unless she would consent to occupy it with him, and Bess, on being thus appealed to, affirmed that the only motive that would induce her to consent to such an arrangement would be her desire to protect him from his mischievous neighbours. While they were thus discoursing, Old Mitton, who, it appeared had followed them, arrived well nigh exhausted, and Baldwyn went in search of some refreshment for him.

By this time the storm had sufficiently cleared off to allow the others to take their departure, and though the miller and Bess would fain have dissuaded the knight from the enterprise, he was not to be turned aside, but, bidding his men attend him, set forth. The rain had ceased, but it was still very dark. Under cover of the gloom, however, they thought they could approach the house unobserved, and obtain an entrance before Mistress Nutter could be aware of their arrival. In this expectation they pursued their way in silence, and soon stood before the gates. These were fastened, but as no one appeared to be on the watch, Sir Thomas, in a low tone, ordered some of his men to scale the walls, with the intention of following himself; but scarcely had a head risen above the level of the brickwork than the flash of an arquebuss was seen, and the man jumped backwards, luckily just in time to avoid the bullet that whistled over him. An alarm was then instantly given, voices were heard in the garden, mingled with the furious barking of hounds. A bell was rung

from the upper part of the house, and lights appeared at the windows.

Meanwhile, some of the men, less alarmed than their comrade, contrived to scramble over the wall, and were soon engaged hand to hand with those on the opposite side. But not alone had they to contend with adversaries like themselves. The stag-hounds, which had done so much execution during the first attack upon the house by Roger Nowell, raged amongst them like so many lions, rending their limbs, and seizing their throats. To free themselves from these formidable antagonists was their first business, and by dint of thrust from pike, cut from sword, and ball from caliver, they succeeded in slaughtering two of them, and driving the others, badly wounded, and savagely howling, away. In doing this, however, they themselves had sustained considerable injury. Three of their number were lying on the ground, in no condition, from their broken heads, or shattered limbs, for renewing the combat.

Thus, so far as the siege had gone, success seemed to declare itself rather for the defenders than the assailants, when a new impulse was given to the latter, by the bursting open of the gates, and the sudden influx of Sir Thomas Metcalfe and the rest of his troop. The knight was closely followed by the Alsatian captains, who, with tremendous oaths in their mouths, and slashing blades in their hands, declared they would make minced meat of any one opposing their progress. Sir Thomas was equally truculent in expression and ferocious in tone, and as the whole party laid about them right and left, they speedily routed the defenders of the garden, and drove them towards the house. Flushed by their success, the besiegers shouted loudly, and Sir Thomas roared out, that ere many minutes Nowell and Potts should be set free, and Alice Nutter captured. But before he could reach the main door,

Nicholas Assheton, well armed, and attended by some dozen men, presented himself at it. These were instantly joined by the retreating party, and the whole offered a formidable array of opponents, quite sufficient to check the progress of the besiegers. Two or three of the men near Nicholas carried torches, and their light revealed the numbers on both sides.

"What! is it you, Sir Thomas Metcalfe?" cried the squire. "Do you commit such outrages as this — do you break into habitations like a robber, rifle them, and murder their inmates? Explain yourself, Sir, or I will treat you as I would a common plunderer; shoot you through the head, or hang you to the first tree if I take you."

"Zounds and fury!" rejoined Metcalfe. "Do you dare to liken me to a common robber and murderer? Take care you do not experience the same fate as that with which you threaten me, with this difference only, that the hangman — the common hangman of Lancaster — shall serve your turn. I am come hither to arrest a notorious witch, and to release two gentlemen who are unlawfully detained prisoners by her; and if you do not instantly deliver her up to me, and produce the two individuals in question, Master Roger Nowell and Master Potts, I will force my way into the house, and all injury done to those who oppose me will rest on your head "

"The two gentlemen you have named are perfectly safe and contented in their quarters," replied Nicholas; "and as to the foul and false aspersions you have thrown out against Mistress Nutter, I cast them back in your teeth. Your purpose in coming hither is to redress some private wrong. How is it you have such a rout with you? How is it I behold two notorious bravos by your side — men who have stood in the pillory, and undergone other ignominious punishment for their offences? You cannot answer, and their oaths and threats go for nothing. I now tell you, Sir Thomas, if you do not in-

stantly withdraw your men, and quit these premises, grievous consequences will ensue to you and them."

"I will hear no more," cried Sir Thomas, infuriated to the last degree. "Follow me into the house, and spare none who oppose you."

"You are not in yet," cried Nicholas.

And as he spoke a row of pikes bristled around him, holding the knight at bay, while a hook was fixed in the doublet of each of the Alsatian captains, and they were plucked forward and dragged into the house. This done, Nicholas and his men quickly retreated, and the door was closed and barred upon the enraged and discomfited knight.

CHAPTER XV.

The phantom monk.

MANY hours had passed by, and night had come on — a night profoundly dark. Richard was still lying where he had fallen at the foot of Malkin Tower; for though he had regained his sensibility, he was so bruised and shaken as to be wholly unable to move. His limbs, stiffened and powerless, refused their office, and, after each unsuccessful effort, he sank back with a groan.

His sole hope was that Mistress Nutter, alarmed by his prolonged absence, might come to her daughter's assistance, and so discover his forlorn situation; but as time flew by and nothing occurred, he gave himself up for lost.

On a sudden the gloom was dispersed, and a silvery light shed over the scene. The moon had broken through a rack of clouds, and illumined the tall mysterious tower, and the dreary waste around it. With the light a ghostly figure near him became visible to Richard, which under other circumstances would have excited terror in his breast, but which now

only filled him with wonder. It was that of a Cistercian monk; the vestments were old and faded, the visage white and corpse-like. Richard at once recognised the phantom he had seen in the banquet-hall at the abbey, and had afterwards so rashly followed to the conventual church. It touched him with its icy fingers, and a chilness like death shot through his heart.

"Why dost thou trouble me thus, unhappy spirit?" said the young man. "Leave me, I adjure thee, and let me die in peace!"

"Thou wilt not die yet, Richard Assheton," returned the phantom; "and my intention is not to trouble thee, but to serve thee. Without my aid thou wouldst perish where thou liest, but I will raise thee up, and set thee on thy way."

"Wilt thou help me to liberate Alizon?" demanded Richard.

"Do not concern thyself further about her," replied the phantom; "she must pass through an ordeal with which nothing human may interfere. If she escape it you will meet again. If not, it were better thou shouldst be in thy grave than see her. Take this phial. Drink the liquid it contains, and thy strength will return to thee."

"How do I know thou art not sent hither by Mother Demdike to tempt me?" demanded Richard, doubtfully. "I have already fallen into her snares," he added, with a groan.

"I am Mother Demdike's enemy, and the appointed instrument of her punishment," replied the monk, in a tone that did not admit of question. "Drink, and fear nothing."

Richard obeyed, and the next moment sprang to his feet.

"Thou hast indeed restored me!" he cried. "I would fain reach the secret entrance to the tower."

"Attempt it not, I charge thee!" cried the phantom; "but depart instantly for Pendle Hill."

"Wherefore should I go thither?" demanded Richard.

"Thou wilt learn anon," returned the monk. "I cannot tell thee more now. Dismount at the foot of the hill, and proceed to the beacon. Thou know'st it?"

"I do," replied Richard. "There a fire was lighted which was meant to set all England in a blaze."

"And which led many good men to destruction," said the monk, in a tone of indescribable sadness. "Alas! for him who kindled it. The offence is not yet worked out. But depart without more delay; and look not back."

As Richard hastened towards the spot where he had left Merlin, he fancied he was followed by the phantom, but, obedient to the injunction he received, he did not turn his head. As he mounted the horse, who neighed cheerily as he drew near, he found he was right in supposing the monk to be behind him, for he heard his voice calling out, "Linger not by the way. To the beacon! — to the beacon!"

Thus exhorted, the young man dashed off, and, to his great surprise, found Merlin as fresh as if he had undergone no fatigue during the day. It would almost seem, from his spirit, that he had partaken of the same wondrous elixir which had revived his master. Down the hill he plunged, regardless of the steep descent, and soon entered the thicket where the storm had fallen upon them, and where so many acts of witchcraft were performed. Now, neither accident nor obstacle occurred to check the headlong pace of the animal; though the stones rattled after him as he struck them with his flying hoof. The moonlight quivered on the branches of the trees, and on the tender spray, and all looked as tranquil and beautiful as it had so lately been gloomy and disturbed. The wood was passed, and the last and steepest descent cleared. The little bridge was at hand, and beneath was Pendle Water, rushing over its rocky bed, and glittering like silver in the moon's rays. But here Richard had well-nigh received a

check. A party of armed men, it proved, occupied the road leading to Rough Lee, about a bow-shot from the bridge, and as soon as they perceived he was taking the opposite course, with the apparent intention of avoiding them, they shouted to him to stay. This shout made Richard aware of their presence, for he had not before observed them, as they were concealed by the intervention of some small trees; but though surprised at the circumstance, and not without apprehension that they might be there with a hostile design to Mistress Nutter, he did not slacken his pace. A horseman, who appeared to be their leader, rode after him for a short distance, but finding pursuit futile, he desisted, pouring forth a volley of oaths and threats, in a voice that proclaimed him as Sir Thomas Metcalfe. This discovery confirmed Richard in his supposition that mischief was intended Mistress Nutter; but even this conviction, strengthened by his antipathy to Metcalfe, was not sufficiently strong to induce him to stop. Promising himself to return on the morrow, and settle accounts with the insolent knight, he speeded on, and passing the mill, tracked the rocky gorge above it, and began to mount another hill. Despite the ascent, Merlin never slackened his pace, but, though his master would have restrained him, held on as before. But the brow of the hill attained, Richard compelled him to a brief halt.

By this time the sky was comparatively clear, bnt small clouds were sailing across the heavens, and at one moment the moon would be obscured by them, and the next, burst forth with sudden effulgence. These alternations produced corresponding effects on the broad, brown, heathy plain extending below, and fantastic shadows were cast upon it, which it needed not Richard's heated imagination to liken to evil beings flying past. The wind, too, lay in the direction of the north end of Pendle Hill, whither Richard was about to shape

his course, and the shadows consequently trooped off towards that quarter. The vast mass of Pendle rose in gloomy majesty before him, being thrown into shade, except at its crown, where a flood of radiance rested.

Like an eagle swooping upon his prey, Richard descended into the valley, and like a stag pursued by the huntsman he speeded across it. Neither dyke, morass, nor stone wall checked him, or made him turn aside; and almost as fast as the clouds hurrying above him, and their shadows travelling at his feet, did he reach the base of Pendle Hill.

Making up to a shed, which, though empty, luckily contained a wisp or two of hay, he turned Merlin into it, and commenced the ascent of the hill on foot. After attaining a considerable elevation, he looked down from the giddy heights upon the valley he had just traversed. A few huts, forming the little village of Barley, lay sleeping in the moonlight beneath him, while further off could be just discerned Goldshaw, with its embowered church. A line of thin vapour marked the course of Pendle Water, and thicker mists hovered over the mosses. The shadows were still passing over the plain.

Pressing on, Richard soon came among the rocks protruding from the higher part of the hill, and as the path was here not more than a foot wide, rarely taken except by the sheep and their guardians, it was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, as a single false step would have been fatal. After some toil, and not without considerable risk, he reached the summit of the hill.

As he bounded over the springy turf and inhaled the pure air of that exalted region, his spirits revived, and new elasticity was communicated to his limbs. He shaped his course near the edge of the hill, so that the extensive view it commanded was fully displayed. But his eye rested on the mountainous range on the opposite side of the valley where Malkin

Tower was situated. Even in broad day the accursed structure would have been invisible, as it stood on the further side of the hill, overlooking Barrowford and Colne, but Richard knew its position well, and while his gaze was fixed upon the point, he saw a star shoot down from the heavens, and apparently alight near the spot. The circumstance alarmed him, for he could not help thinking it ominous of ill to Alizon.

Nothing, however, followed to increase his misgivings, and ere long he came in sight of the beacon. The ground had been gradually rising, and if he had proceeded a few hundred yards further, a vast panorama would have opened upon him, comprising a large part of Lancashire on the one hand, and on the other an equally extensive portion of Yorkshire. Forest and fell, black moor and bright stream, old castle and stately hall, would have then been laid before him as in a map. But other thoughts engrossed him, and he went straight on. As far as he could discern he was alone on the hill top; and the silence and solitude, coupled with the ill report of the place, which at this hour was said to be often visited by foul hags, for the performance of their unhallowed rites, awakened superstitious fears in his breast.

He was soon by the side of the beacon. The stones were still standing as they had been reared by Paslew, and on looking at them he was astonished to find the hollow within them filled with dry furze, brushwood, and fagots, as if in readiness for another signal. In passing round the circle, his surprise was still further increased by discovering a torch, and not far from it, in one of the interstices of the stones, a dark lantern, in which, on removing the shade, he found a candle burning, It was now clear the beacon was to be kindled that night, though for what end he could not conjecture, and equally clear that he was brought thither to fire it. He put

back the lantern into its place, took up the torch, and held himself in readiness.

Half an hour elapsed, and nothing occurred. During this interval it had become dark. A curtain of clouds was drawn over the moon and stars.

Suddenly, a hurtling noise was heard in the air, and it seemed to the watcher as if a troop of witches were alighting at distance from him.

A loud hubbub of voices ensued — then there was a trampling of feet, accompanied by discordant strains of music — after which, a momentary silence ensued, and a harsh voice asked —

"Why are we brought hither?"

"It is not for a sabbath," shouted another voice, "for there is neither fire nor cauldron."

"Mother Demdike would not summon us without good reason," cried a third. "We shall learn presently what we have to do."

"The more mischief the better," rejoined another voice.

"Ay, mischief! mischief! mischief!" echoed the rest of the crew.

"You shall have enough of it to content you," rejoined Mother Demdike. "I have called you hither to be present at a sacrifice."

Hideous screams of laughter followed this announcement, and the voice that had spoken first asked —

"A sacrifice of whom?"

"An unbaptized babe, stolen from its sleeping mother's breast," rejoined another. "Mother Demdike hath often played that trick before — ho! ho!"

"Peace!" thundered the hag — "It is no babe I am about to kill, but a full-grown maid — ay, and one of rarest beauty too. What think ye of Alizon Device?"

"Thy grand-daughter!" cried several voices, in surprise.

"Alice Nutter's daughter — for such she is," rejoined the hag. "I have held her captive in Malkin Tower, and have subjected her to every trial and temptation I could devise, but I have failed in shaking her courage, or in winning her over to our master. All the horrors of the vault have been tried upon her in vain. Even the last terrible ordeal, which no one has hitherto sustained, proved ineffectual. She went through it unmoved."

"Heaven be praised!" murmured Richard.

"It seems I have no power over her soul," pursued the hag, "but I have over her body, and she shall die here, and by my hand. But mind me, not a drop of blood must fall to the ground."

"Have no fear," cried several voices, "we will catch it in our palms and quaff it."

"Hast thou thy knife, Mouldheels?" asked Mother Demdike.

"Ay," replied the other, "it is long, and sharp, and will do thy business well. Thy grandson, Jem Device, notched it by killing swine, and my goodman ground it only yesterday. Take it."

"I will plunge it to her heart!" cried Mother Demdike, with an infernal laugh. "And now I will tell you why we have neither fire nor cauldron. On questioning the ebon image in the vault as to the place where the sacrifice should be made, I received for answer that it must be here, and in darkness. No human eye but our own must behold it. We are safe on this score, for no one is likely to come hither at this hour. No fire must be kindled, or the sacrifice will result in destruction to us all. Ye have heard, and understand?"

"We do," replied several husky voices.

"And so do I," said Richard, taking hold of the dark lantern.

"And now for the girl," cried Mother Demdike.

CHAPTER XVI.

One o'clock.

MISTRESS NUTTER and Mother Chattox were still at the hut, impatiently awaiting the return of Fancy. But nearly an hour elapsed before he appeared.

"What has detained thee so long?" demanded the hag, sharply, as he stood before them.

"You shall hear, Mistress," replied Fancy; "I have had a busy time of it, I assure you, and thought I should never accomplish my errand. On arriving at Rough Lee, I found the place invested by Sir Thomas Metcalfe, and a host of armed men, who had been sent thither by Parson Holden, for the joint purpose of arresting you, Madam," addressing Mistress Nutter, "and liberating Nowell and Potts. The knight was in a great fume, for, in spite of the force brought against it, the house had been stoutly defended by Nicholas Assheton, who had worsted the besieging party, and captured two Alsatian captains, hangers on of Sir Thomas. Appearing in the character of an enemy, I was immediately surrounded by Metcalfe and his men, who swore they would cut my throat unless I undertook to procure the liberation of the two bravos in question, as well as that of Nowell and Potts. I told them I was come for the express purpose of setting free the two last-named gentlemen; but, with respect to the former, I had no instructions, and they must arrange the matter with Master Nicholas himself. Upon this Sir Thomas became exceedingly wroth and insolent, and proceeded to such lengths, that I resolved to chastise him, and in so doing performed a feat which will tend

greatly to exalt Richard's character for courage and strength."

"Let us hear it, my doughty champion," cried Mother Chattox.

"While Metcalfe was pouring forth his rage, and menacing me with uplifted hand," pursued the familiar, "I seized him by the throat, dragged him from his horse, and in spite of the efforts of his men, whose blows fell upon me thick as hail, and quite as harmlessly, I bore him through the garden to the back of the house, where my shouts soon brought Nicholas and others to my assistance, and after delivering my captive to them, I dismounted. The squire, you will imagine, was astonished to see me, and greatly applauded my prowess. I replied, with the modesty becoming my assumed character, that I had done nothing, and, in reality, the feat was nothing to me; but I told him I had something of the utmost importance to communicate, and which could not be delayed a moment; whereupon, he led me to a small room adjoining the hall, while the crest-fallen knight was left to vent his rage and mortification on the grooms to whose custody he was committed."

"You acted your part to perfection," said Mistress Nutter.

"Ay, trust my sweet Fancy for that," said the hag — "there is no familiar like him — none whatever."

"Your praises make me blush," rejoined Fancy. "But to proceed. I fulfilled your instructions to the letter, and excited Nicholas's horror and indignation by the tale I told him. I laughed in my sleeve all the while, but I maintained a very different countenance with him. He thought me full of anguish and despair. He questioned me as to my proceedings at Malkin Tower, and I amazed him with the description of a fearful storm I had encountered — of my interview with old Demdike, and her atrocious treatment of Alizon — to all of which he listened with profound interest. Richard himself

could not have moved him more — perhaps not so much. As soon as I had finished, he vowed he would rescue Alizon from the murtherous hag, and prevent the latter from committing further mischief; and bidding me come with him, we repaired to the room in which Nowell and Potts were confined. We found them both fast asleep in their chairs; but Nicholas quickly awakened them, and some explanations ensued which did not at first appear very clear and satisfactory to either magistrate or attorney, but in the end they agreed to accompany us on the expedition, Master Potts declaring it would compensate him for all his mischances if he could arrest Mother Demdike."

"I hope he may have his wish," said Mother Chattox.

"Ay, but he declared that his next step should be to arrest you, Mistress," observed Fancy, with a laugh.

"Arrest me!" cried the hag. "Marry, let him touch me, if he dares. My term is not out yet, and, with thee to defend me, my brave Fancy, I have no fear."

"Right!" replied the familiar; "but to go on with my story. — Sir Thomas Metcalfe was next brought forward, and after some warm altercation, peace was at length established between him and the squire, and hands were shaken all round. Wine was then called for by Nicholas, who, at the same time, directed that the two Alsatian captains should be brought up from the cellar, where they had been placed for safety. The first part of the order was obeyed, but the second was found impracticable, inasmuch as the two heroes had found their way to the inner cellar, and had emptied so many flasks that they were utterly incapable of moving. While the wine was being discussed, an unexpected arrival took place."

"An arrival! — of whom?" inquired Mistress Nutter, eagerly.

"Sir Ralph Assheton and a large party," replied Fancy.

"Parson Holden, it seems, not content with sending Sir Thomas and his rout to the aid of his friends, had proceeded for the same purpose to Whalley, and the result was the appearance of the new party. A brief explanation from Nicholas and myself served to put Sir Ralph in possession of all that had occurred, and he declared his readiness to accompany the expedition to Pendle Hill, and to take all his followers with him. Sir Thomas Metcalfe expressed an equally strong desire to go with him, and of course it was acceded to. I am bound to tell you, Madam," added Fancy to Mistress Nutter, "that your conduct is viewed in a most suspicious light by every one of these persons except Nicholas, who made an effort to defend you."

"I care not what happens to me, if I succeed in rescuing my child," said the lady. "But have they set out on the expedition?"

"By this time, no doubt they have," replied Fancy, "I got off by saying I would ride on to Pendle Hill, and stationing myself on its summit, give them a signal when they should advance upon their prey. And now, good mistress, I pray you dismiss me. I want to cast off this shape, which I find an incumbrance, and resume my own. I will return when it is time for you to set out."

The hag waved her hand, and the familiar was gone.

Half an hour elapsed, and he returned not. Mistress Nutter became fearfully impatient. Three-quarters, and even the old hag was uneasy. An hour, and he stood before them — dwarfish, fiendish, monstrous.

"It is time," he said, in a harsh voice, but the tones were music in the wretched mother's ears.

"Come, then," she cried, rushing wildly forth.

"Ay, ay, I come," replied the hag, following her. "Not so fast. You cannot go without me."

"Nor either of you without me," added Fancy. "Here, good Mistress, is your broomstick."

"Away for Pendle Hill!" screamed the hag.

"Ay, for Pendle Hill!" echoed Fancy.

And there was a whirling of dark figures through the air as before.

Presently they alighted on the summit of Pendle Hill, which seemed to be wrapped in a dense cloud, for Mistress Nutter could scarcely see a yard before her. Fancy's eyes, however, were powerful enough to penetrate the gloom, for stepping back a few yards, he said,

"The expedition is at the foot of the hill, where they have made a halt. We must wait a few moments till I can ascertain what they mean to do. Ah! I see. They are dividing into three parties. One detachment, headed by Nicholas Assheton, with whom are Potts and Nowell, is about to make the ascent from the spot where they now stand; another, commanded by Sir Ralph Assheton, is moving towards the butt-end of the hill; and the third, headed by Sir Thomas Metcalfe, is proceeding to the right. These are goodly preparations — ha! ha! But, what do I behold? The first detachment have a prisoner with them. It is Jem Device, whom they have captured on the way, I suppose. I can tell from the rascal's looks that he is planning an escape. Patience, Madam, I must see how he executes his design. There is no hurry. They are all scrambling up the hill sides. Some one slips, and rolls down, and bruises himself severely against the loose stones. Ho! ho!—it is Master Potts. He is picked up by Jem Device, who takes him on his shoulders. What means the knave by such attention? We shall see anon. They continue to fight their way upward, and have now reached the narrow path among the rocks. Take heed, or your necks will be broken.

Ho! ho! Well done, Jem, — bravo! lad. Thy scheme is out now — ho! ho!"

"What has he done?" asked Mother Chattox.

"Run off with the attorney — with Master Potts," replied Fancy; "disappeared in the gloom, so that it is impossible Nicholas can follow him — ho! ho!"

"But my child! — where is my child?" cried Mistress Nutter, in agitated impatience.

"Come with me, and I will lead you to her," replied Fancy, taking her hand; "and do you keep close to us, Mistress," he added to Mother Chattox.

Moving quickly along the heathy plain, they soon reached a small dry hollow, about a hundred paces from the beacon, in the midst of which, as in a grave, was deposited the inanimate form of Alizon. When the spot was indicated to her by Fancy, the miserable mother flew to it, and, with indescribable delight, clasped her child to her breast. But the next moment, a new fear seized her, for the limbs were stiff and cold, and the heart had apparently ceased to beat.

"She is dead!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter, frantically.

"No, she is only in a magical trance," said Fancy; "my mistress can instantly revive her."

"Prithee do so, then, good Chattox," implored the lady.

"Better defer it till we have taken her hence," rejoined the hag.

"Oh! no, now — now! — let me be assured she lives!" cried Mistress Nutter.

Mother Chattox reluctantly assented, and touching Alizon with her skinny finger, first upon the heart and then upon the brow, the poor girl began to show symptoms of life.

"My child — my child," cried Mistress Nutter, straining her to her breast; "I am come to save thee!"

"You will scarce succeed if you tarry here longer," said Fancy. "Away!"

"Ay, come away," shrieked the hag, seizing Alizon's arm.

"Where are you about to take her?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"To my hut," replied Mother Chattox.

"No, no — she shall not go there," returned the lady.

"And wherefore not?" screamed the hag. "She is mine now, and I say she *shall* go."

"Right, Mistress," said Fancy, "and leave the lady here if she objects to accompany her. But be quick."

"You shall not take her from me," shrieked Mistress Nutter, holding her daughter fast. "I see through your diabolical purpose. You have the same dark design as Mother Demdike, and would sacrifice her — but she shall not go with you, neither will I."

"Tut!" exclaimed the hag, "you have lost your senses on a sudden. I do not want your daughter. But come away, or Mother Demdike will surprise us."

"Do not trifle with her longer," whispered Fancy to the hag, "drag the girl away, or you will lose her. A few moments, and it will be too late."

Mother Chattox made an attempt to obey him, but Mistress Nutter resisted her.

"Curses on her!" she muttered, "she is too strong for me. Do thou help me," she added, appealing to Fancy.

"I cannot," he replied, "I have done all I dare to help you. You must accomplish the rest yourself."

"But, my sweet imp, recollect —"

"I recollect I have a master," interrupted the familiar.

"And a mistress, too," cried the hag; "and she will chastise thee if thou art disobedient. I command thee to carry off this girl."

"I have already told you I dare not, and I now say I will not," replied Fancy.

"Will not!" shrieked the hag. "Thou shalt smart for this. I will bury thee in the heart of this mountain, and make thee labour within it like a gnome. I will set thee to count the sands on the river's bed, and the leaves on the forest trees. Thou shalt know neither rest nor respite."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Fancy, mockingly.

"Dost deride me?" cried the hag. "I will do it, thou saucy jackanapes. For the last time, wilt obey me?"

"No," replied Fancy, "and for this reason — your term is out. It expired at midnight."

"It is false!" shrieked the hag, in accents of mixed terror and rage. "I have months to run, and will renew it."

"Before midnight you might have done so, but it is now too late — your reign is over," rejoined Fancy. "Farewell, sweet Mistress. We shall meet once again, though scarcely under such pleasant circumstances as heretofore."

"It cannot be, my darling Fancy; thou art jesting with me," whimpered the hag; "thou wouldst not delude thy doating mistress thus."

"I have done with thee, foul hag," rejoined the familiar, "and am right glad my service is ended. I could have saved thee, but would not, and delayed my return for that very purpose. Thy soul was forfeited when I came back to thy hut."

"Then curses on thee for thy treachery," cried the hag, "and on thy master who deceived me in the bond he placed before me."

The familiar laughed hoarsely.

"But what of Mother Demdike?" pursued the hag, "Hast thou no comfort for me? Tell me her hour is likewise come, and I will forgive thee. But do not let her triumph over me."

The familiar made no answer, but, laughing derisively, stamped upon the ground, and it opened to receive him.

"Alizon!" cried Mistress Nutter, who, in the meantime, had vainly endeavoured to rouse her daughter to full consciousness, "fly with me, my child. The enemy is at hand."

"What enemy?" asked Alizon, faintly. "I have so many, that I know not whom you mean."

"But this is the worst of all — this is Mother Demdike," cried Mistress Nutter. "She would take your life. If we can but conceal ourselves for a short while, we are safe."

"I am too weak to move," said Alizon; "besides, I dare not trust you. I have been deceived already. You may be an evil spirit in the likeness of my mother."

"Oh! no, I am indeed your own — own mother," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Ask this old woman if it is not so."

"She is a witch herself," replied Alizon. "I will not trust either of you. You are both in league with Mother Demdike."

"We are in league to save thee from her, foolish wench!" cried Mother Chattox, "but thy perverseness will defeat all our schemes."

"Since you will not fly, my child," cried Mistress Nutter, "kneel down, and pray earnestly for deliverance. Pray, while there is yet time."

As she spoke, a growl like thunder was heard in the air, and the earth trembled beneath their feet.

"Nay, now I am sure you are my mother!" cried Alizon, flinging herself into Mistress Nutter's arms; "and I will go with you."

But before they could move, several dusky figures were seen rushing towards them.

"Be on your guard!" cried Mother Chattox; "here comes old Demdike with her troop. I will aid you all I can."

"Down on your knees!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter.

Alizon obeyed, but ere a word could pass her lips, the infuriated hag, attended by her beldame band, stood beside them.

"Ha! who is here?" she cried. "Let me see who dares interrupt my mystic rites."

And raising her hand, the black cloud hanging over the hill was rent asunder, and the moon shone down upon them, revealing the old witch, armed with the sacrificial knife, her limbs shaking with fury, and her eyes flashing with preternatural light. It revealed, also, her weird attendants, as well as the group before her, consisting of the kneeling figure of Alizon, protected by the outstretched arms of her mother, and further defended by Mother Chattox, who planted herself in front of them.

Mother Demdike eyed the group for a moment as if she would annihilate them.

"Out of my way, Chattox!" she vociferated — "out of my way, or I will drive my knife to thy heart." And as her old antagonist maintained her ground, she unhesitatingly advanced upon her, smote her with the weapon, and, as she fell to the ground, stepped over her bleeding body.

"Now, what dost thou here, Alice Nutter?" she cried, menacing her with the reeking blade.

"I am come for my child, whom thou hast stolen from me," replied the lady.

"Thou art come to witness her slaughter," replied the witch, fiercely. "Begone, or I will serve thee as I have just served old Chattox."

"I am not sped yet," cried the wounded hag; "I shall live to see thee bound hand and foot, by the officers of justice, and, certain thou wilt perish miserably, I shall die content."

"Spit out thy last drops of venom, black viper," rejoined

Mother Demdike; "when I have done with the others, I will return and finish thee. Alice Nutter, thou knowest it is vain to struggle with me. Give me up the girl."

"Wilt thou accept my life for hers?" said Mistress Nutter.

"Of what account would thy life be to me?" rejoined Mother Demdike, disdainfully. "If it would profit me to take it, I would do so without thy consent, but I am about to make an oblation to our master, and thou art his already. Snatch her child from her — we waste time," she added, to her attendants.

And immediately the weird crew rushed forward, and, in spite of the miserable mother's efforts, tore Alizon from her.

"I told you it was in vain to contend with me," said Mother Demdike.

"Oh, that I could call down heaven's vengeance upon thy accursed head!" cried Mistress Nutter; "but I am forsaken alike of God and man, and shall die despairing."

"Rave on, thou wilt have ample leisure," replied the hag. "And now bring the girl this way," she added to the beldames; "the sacrifice must be made near the beacon."

And as Alizon was borne away, Mistress Nutter uttered a cry of anguish.

"Do not stay here," said Mother Chattox, raising herself with difficulty. "Go after her. You may yet save your daughter."

"But how?" cried Mistress Nutter, distractedly, "I have no power now."

As she spoke, a dusky form rose up beside her. It was her familiar.

"Will you return to your duty, if I help you in this extremity?" he said.

"Ay, do, do!" cried Mother Chattox. "Any thing to avenge yourself upon that murtherous hag."

"Peace!" cried the familiar, spurning her with his cloven foot.

"I do not want vengeance," said Mistress Nutter; "I only want to save my child."

"Then you consent on that condition?" said the familiar.

"No," replied Mistress Nutter, firmly. "I now perceive I am not utterly lost, since you try to regain me. I have renounced thy master, and will make no new bargain with him. Get hence, tempter!"

"Think not to escape us," cried the familiar; "no penitence — no absolution can save thee. Thy name is written on the judgment-scroll, and cannot be effaced. I would have aided thee, but since my offer is rejected, I leave thee."

"You will not let him go!" screamed Mother Chattox. "Oh, that the chance were mine!"

"Be silent, or I will beat thy brains out," said the familiar. "Once more, am I dismissed?"

"Ay, for ever," replied Mistress Nutter.

And as the familiar disappeared, she flew to the spot where her child had been taken.

About twenty paces from the beacon, a circle had again been formed by the unhallowed crew, in the midst of which stood Mother Demdike, with the gory knife in her hand, muttering spells and incantations, and performing mystical ceremonials.

Every now and then, her companions joined in these rites, and chanted a song couched in a wild unintelligible jargon. Beside the witch knelt Alizon, with her hands tied behind her back, so that she could not raise them in supplication; her hair

unbound, and cast loosely over her person, and a thick bandage fastened over her eyes and mouth.

The initiatory ceremonies over, the old hag approached her victim, when Mistress Nutter forced herself through the circle, and cast herself at her feet.

"Spare her!" she cried, clinging to her knees; "it shall be well for thee, if thou dost so."

"Again interrupted!" cried the witch, furiously. "This time I will show thee no mercy. Take thy fate, meddlesome woman!"

And she raised the knife, but ere the weapon could descend, it was seized by Mistress Nutter, and wrested from her grasp. In another instant, Alizon's arms were liberated, and the bandage removed from her eyes.

"Now, it is my turn to threaten. I have thee in my power, infernal hag," cried Mistress Nutter, holding the knife to the witch's throat, and clasping her daughter with the other arm. "Wilt let us go?"

"No," replied Mother Demdike, springing nimbly backwards. "You shall both die. I will soon disarm thee."

And making one or two passes with her hands, Mistress Nutter dropped the weapon, and instantly became fixed and motionless, with her daughter, equally rigid, in her arms. They looked as if suddenly turned to marble.

"Now to complete the ceremonial," cried Mother Demdike, picking up the knife.

And then she began to mutter an impious address preparatory to the sacrifice, when a loud clangour was heard like the stroke of a hammer upon a bell.

"What was that?" exclaimed the witch, in alarm.

"Were there a clock here, I should say it had struck one," replied Mouldheels.

"It must be our master's time-piece," said another witch.

"One o'clock!" exclaimed Mother Demdike, who appeared stupified with fear, "and the sacrifice not made — then I am lost!"

A derisive laugh reached her ears. It proceeded from Mother Chattox, who had contrived to raise herself to her feet, and, tottering forward, now passed through the appalled circle.

"Ay, thy term is out — thy soul is forfeited like mine — ha! ha!" And she fell to the ground.

"Perhaps it may not be too late," cried Mother Demdike, grasping the knife, and rushing towards Alizon.

But at this moment, a bright flame shot up from the beacon.

Astonishment and terror seized the hag, and she uttered a loud cry, which was echoed by the rest of the crew.

The flame mounted higher and higher, and burnt each moment more brightly, illumining the whole summit of the hill. By its light could be seen a band of men, some of whom were on horseback, speeding towards the place of meeting.

Scared by the sight, the witches fled, but were turned by another band advancing from the opposite quarter. They then made towards the spot where their broomsticks were deposited, but ere they could reach it, a third party gained the summit of the hill at this precise point, and immediately started in pursuit of them.

Meanwhile, a young man issuing from behind the beacon, flew towards Mistress Nutter and her daughter. The moment the flame burst forth, the spell cast over them by Mother Demdike was broken, and motion and speech restored.

"Alizon!" exclaimed the young man, as he came up, "your trials are over. You are safe."

"Oh, Richard!" she replied, falling into his arms, "have we been preserved by you?"

"I am a mere instrument in the hands of Heaven," he replied.

Mother Demdike made no attempt at flight with the rest of the witches, but remained for a few moments absorbed in comtemplation of the flaming beacon. Her hand still grasped the murderous weapon she had raised against Alizon, but it had dropped to her side when the fire burst forth. At length she turned fiercely to Richard, and demanded —

"Was it thou who kindled the beacon?"

"It was!" replied the young man.

"And who bade thee do it — who brought thee hither?" pursued the witch.

"An enemy of thine, old woman!" replied Richard.

"His vengeance has been slow in coming, but it has arrived at last."

"But who is he? I see him not!" rejoined Mother Demdike.

"You will see him before yon flame expires," said Richard. "I should have come to your assistance sooner, Alizon," he continued, turning to her, "but I was forbidden. And I knew I should best ensure your safety by compliance with the injunctions I had received."

"Some guardian spirit must have interposed to preserve us," replied Alizon, "for such only could have successfully combated with the evil beings from whom we have been delivered."

"Thy spirit is unable to preserve thee now!" cried Mother Demdike, aiming a deadly blow at her with the knife. But, fortunately, the attempt was foreseen by Richard, who caught her arm, and wrested the weapon from her.

"Curses on thee, Richard Assheton," cried the infuriated hag, — "and on thee too, Alizon Device, I cannot work ye the immediate ill I wish. I cannot make ye loathsome in one

another's eyes. I cannot maim your limbs, or blight your beauty. I cannot deliver you over to devilish possession. But I can bequeath you a legacy of hate. What I say will come to pass. Thou, Alizon, wilt never wed Richard Assheton — never. Vainly shall ye struggle with your destiny — vainly indulge hopes of happiness. Misery and despair, and an early grave, are in store for both you. He shall be to you your worst enemy, and you shall be to him destruction. Think of the witch's prediction and tremble, and may her deadliest curse rest upon your heads."

"Oh, Richard!" exclaimed Alizon, who would have sunk to the ground if he had not sustained her. "Why did you not prevent this terrible malediction?"

"He could not," replied Mother Demdike, with a laugh of exultation; "it shall work, and thy doom shall be accomplished. And now to make an end of old Chattox, and then they may take me where they please."

And she was approaching her old enemy with the intention of putting her threat into execution, when James Device, who appeared to start from the ground, rushed swiftly towards her.

"What art thou doing here, Jem?" cried the hag, regarding him with angry surprise. "Dost thou not see we are surrounded by enemies. I cannot escape them — but thou art young and active. Away with thee!"

"Not without yo, granny," replied Jem. "Ey ha' run os fast os ey could to help yo. Stick fast howld on me," he added, snatching her up in his arms, "an ey'n bring yo clear off yet."

And he set off at a rapid pace with his burthen, Richard being too much occupied with Alizon to oppose him.

CHAPTER XVII.

How the beacon fire was extinguished.

Soon after this, Nicholas Assheton, attended by two or three men, came up, and asked whither the old witch had flown.

Mistress Nutter pointed out the course taken by the fugitive, who had run towards the northern extremity of the hill, down the sides of which he had already plunged.

"She has been carried off by her grandson, Jem Device," said Mistress Nutter; "be quick, or you will lose her."

"Ay, be quick — be quick!" added Mother Chattox. "Yonder they went, to the back of the beacon."

Casting a look at the wretched speaker, and finding she was too grievously wounded to be able to move, Nicholas bestowed no further thought upon her, but set off with his companions in the direction pointed out. He speedily arrived at the edge of the hill, and, looking down it, sought in vain for any appearance of the fugitives. The sides were here steep and shelving, and some hundred yards lower down were broken into ridges, behind one of which it was possible the old witch and her grandson might be concealed; so, without a moment's hesitation, the squire descended, and began to search about in the hollows, scrambling over the loose stones, or sliding down for some paces with the uncertain boggy soil, when he fancied he heard a plaintive cry. He looked around, but could see no one. The whole side of the mountain was lighted up by the fire from the beacon, which, instead of diminishing, burnt with increased ardour, so that every object was as easily to be discerned as in the day time: but, notwithstanding this, he could not detect whence the sound proceeded. It was repeated, but more faintly than before, and Nicholas almost persuaded himself it was the voice of

Potts calling for help. Motioning to his followers, who were engaged in the search like himself, to keep still, the squire listened intently, and again caught the sound, being this time convinced it arose from the ground. Was it possible the unfortunate attorney had been buried alive? Or had he been thrust into some hole, and a stone placed over it, which he found it impossible to remove? The latter idea seemed the more probable, and Nicholas was guided by a feeble repetition of the noise towards a large fragment of rock, which, on examination, had evidently been rolled from a point immediately over the mouth of a hollow. The squire instantly set himself to work to dislodge the ponderous stone, and, aided by two of his men, who lent their broad shoulders to the task, quickly accomplished his object, disclosing what appeared to be the mouth of a cavernous recess. From out of this, as soon as the stone was removed, popped the head of Master Potts, and Nicholas, bidding him be of good cheer, laid hold of him to draw him forth, as he seemed to have some difficulty in extricating himself, when the attorney cried out —

"Do not pull so hard, squire! That accursed Jem Device has got hold of my legs. Not so hard, Sir, I entreat."

"Bid him let go," said Nicholas, unable to refrain from laughing, "or we will unearth him from his badger's hole."

"He pays no heed to what I say to him," cried Potts. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! he is dragging me down again!"

And, as he spoke, the attorney, notwithstanding all Nicholas's efforts to restrain him, was pulled down into the hole. The squire was at a loss what to do, and was considering whether he should resort to the tedious process of digging him out, when a scrambling noise was heard, and the captive's head once more appeared above ground.

"Are you coming out now?" asked Nicholas.

"Alas, no!" replied the attorney, "unless you will make terms with the rascal. He declares he will strangle me, if you do not promise to set him and his grandmother free."

"Is Mother Demdike with him?" asked Nicholas.

"To be sure," replied Potts; "and we are as badly off for room as three foxes in a hole."

"And there is no other outlet?" said the squire.

"I conclude not," replied the attorney. "I groped about like a mole when I was first thrust into the cavern by Jem Device, but I could find no means of exit. The entrance was blocked up by the great stone which you had some difficulty in moving, but which Jem could shift at will; for he pushed it aside in a moment, and brought it back to its place, when he returned just now with the old hag; but probably that was effected by witchcraft."

"Most likely," said Nicholas. "But for your being in it, we would stop up this hole, and bury the two wretches alive."

"Get me out first, good Master Nicholas, I implore of you, and then do what you please," cried Potts. "Jem is tugging at my legs as if he would pull them off."

"We will try who is strongest," said Nicholas, again seizing hold of Potts by the shoulders.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I can't bear it — let go!" shrieked the attorney. "I shall be stretched to twice my natural length. My joints are starting from their sockets, my legs are coming off — oh! oh!"

"Lend a hand here, one of you," cried Nicholas, to the men; "we 'll have him out, whatever be the consequence."

"But I won't come!" roared Potts. "You have no right to use me thus. Torture! oh! oh! my loins are ruptured — my back is breaking — I am a dead man. The hag has got

hold of my right leg, while Jem is tugging with all his force at the left."

"Pull away!" cried Nicholas; "he is coming."

"My legs are off," yelled Potts, as he was plucked suddenly forth, with a jerk that threw the squire and his assistants on their backs. "I shall never be able to walk more. No, heaven be praised!" he added, looking down on his lower limbs, "I have only lost my boots."

"Never mind it, then," cried Nicholas; "but thank your stars you are above ground once more. Hark'ee, Jem!" he continued, shouting down the hole; "If you don't come forth at once, and bring Mother Demdike with you, we 'll close up the mouth of this hole in such a way that you shan't require another grave. D'ye hear?"

"Yeigh," replied Jem, his voice coming hoarsely and hollowly up, like the accents of a ghost. "Am ey to go free if ey comply?"

"Certainly not," replied the squire. "You have a choice between this hole and the hangman's cord at Lancaster, that is all. In either case you will die by suffocation. But be quick — we have wasted time enough already with you."

"Then if that 's aw yo 'll do fo' me, squire, eyn e'en stay wheere ey am," rejoined Jem.

"Very well," replied Nicholas. "Here, my man, stop up this hole with earth and stones. Master Potts, you will lend a hand to the task."

"Readily, Sir," replied the attorney, "though I shall lose the pleasure I had anticipated of seeing that old carrion crow roasted alive."

"Stay a bit, squoire," roared Jem, as preparations were actively made for carrying Nicholas's orders into execution. "Stay a bit, an ey'n cum owt, an bring t'owd woman wi' me."

"I thought you 'd change your mind," replied Nicholas,

laughing. "Be upon your guard," he added, in a low tone, to the others, "and seize him the moment he appears."

But Jem evidently found it no easy matter to perform his promise, for stifled shrieks and other noises proclaimed that a desperate struggle was going on between him and his grandmother.

"Aha!" exclaimed Nicholas, placing his ear to the hole. "The old hag is unwilling to come forth, and spits and scratches like a cat-a-mountain, while Jem gripes her like a terrier. It is a hard tussle between them, but he is getting the better of it, and is pushing her forth. Now look out."

And as he spoke, Mother Demdike's terrible head protruded from the ground, and, despite of the execrations she poured forth upon her enemies, she was instantly seized by them, drawn out of the cavern, and secured. While the men were thus engaged, and while Nicholas's attention was for an instant diverted, Jem bounded forth as suddenly as a wolf from his lair, and, dashing aside all opposition, plunged down the hill.

"It is useless to pursue him," said Nicholas. "He will not escape. The whole country will be roused by the beacon fire, and hue and cry shall be made after him."

"Right!" exclaimed Potts; "and now let some one creep into that cavern, and bring out my boots, and then I shall be in a better condition to attend you."

The request being complied with, and the attorney being once more equipped for walking, the party climbed the hill side, and bringing Mother Demdike with them, shaped their course towards the beacon.

And now to see what had taken place in the interim.

Scarcely had the squire quitted Mistress Nutter than Sir Ralph Assheton rode up to her.

"Why do you loiter here, Madam?" he said, in a stern

tone, somewhat tempered by sorrow. "I have held back to give you an opportunity of escape. The hill is invested by your enemies. On that side Roger Nowell is advancing, and on this Sir Thomas Metcalfe and his followers. You may possibly effect a retreat in he opposite direction, but not a moment must be lost."

"I will go with you," said Alizon.

"No, no," interposed Richard. "You have not strength for the effort, and will only retard her."

"I thank you for your devotion, my child," said Mistress Nutter, with a look of grateful tenderness; "but it is unneeded. I have no intention of flying. I shall surrender myself into the hands of justice."

"Do not mistake the matter, Madam," said Sir Ralph, "and delude yourself with the notion that either your rank or wealth will screen you from punishment. Your guilt is too clearly established to allow you a chance of escape, and, though I myself am acting wrongfully in counselling flight to you, I am led to do so from the friendship once subsisting between us, and the relationship which, unfortunately, I cannot destroy."

"It is you who are mistaken, not I, Sir Ralph," replied Mistress Nutter. "I have no thought of turning aside the sword of justice, but shall court its sharpest edge, hoping, by a full avowal of my offences, in some degree to atone for them, My only regret is, that I shall leave my child unprotected, and that my fate will bring dishonour upon her."

"Oh, think not of me, dear mother," cried Alizon, "but persist unhesitatingly in the course you have laid down. Far rather would I see you act thus — far rather hear the sentiments you have uttered, even though they may be attended by the saddest consequences, than behold you in your former proud position and impenitent. Think not of me, then. Or,

rather, think only how I rejoice that your eyes are at length opened, and that you have cast off the bonds of iniquity. I can now pray for you with the full hope that my intercessions will prevail, and in parting with you in this world shall be sustained by the conviction that we shall meet in eternal happiness hereafter."

Mistress Nutter threw her arms about her daughter's neck, and they mingled their tears together. Sir Ralph Assheton was much moved.

"It is a pity she should fall into their hands," he observed to Richard.

"I know not how to advise," replied the latter, greatly troubled.

"Ah! it is too late," exclaimed the knight; "here come Nowell and Metcalfe. The poor lady's firmness will be severely tested."

The next moment the magistrate and the knight came up, with such of their attendants as were not engaged in pursuing the witches, several of whom had already been captured. On seeing Mistress Nutter, Sir Thomas Metcalfe sprang from his horse, and would have seized her, but Sir Ralph interposed, saying, "She has surrendered herself to me. I will be answerable for her safe custody."

"Your pardon, Sir Ralph," observed Nowell; "the arrest must be formally made, and by a constable. Sparshot, execute your warrant."

Upon this, the official, leaping from his horse, displayed his staff and a piece of parchment to Mistress Nutter, telling her she was his prisoner.

The lady bowed her head.

"Shan ey tee her hands, yer warship?" demanded the constable of the magistrate.

"On no account, fellow," interposed Sir Ralph. "I will have no indignity offered her. I have already said I will be responsible for her."

"You will recollect she is arrested for witchcraft, Sir Ralph," observed Nowell.

"She shall answer to the charges brought against her. I pledge myself to that," replied Sir Ralph.

"And by a full confession," said Mistress Nutter. "You may pledge yourself to that also, Sir Ralph."

"She avows her guilt," cried Nowell. "I take you all to witness it."

"I shall not forget it," said Sir Thomas Metcalfe.

"Nor I — nor I!" cried Sparshot, and two or three others of the attendants.

"This girl is my prisoner," said Sir Thomas Metcalfe, dismounting, and advancing towards Alizon. "She is a witch, as well as the rest."

"It is false," cried Richard, "and if you attempt to lay hands upon her I will strike you to the earth."

"'Sdeath!" exclaimed Metcalfe, drawing his sword, "I will not let this insolence pass unpunished. I have other affronts to chastise. Stand aside, or I will cut your throat."

"Hold, Sir Thomas," cried Sir Ralph Assheton, authoritatively. "Settle your quarrels hereafter, if you have any to adjust; but I will have no fighting now. Alizon is no witch. You are well aware that she was about to be impiously and cruelly sacrificed by Mother Demdike, and her rescue was the main object of our comiug hither."

"Still suspicion attaches to her," said Metcalfe; "whether she be the daughter of Elizabeth Device or Alice Nutter, she comes of a bad stock, and I protest against her being allowed to go free. However, if you are resolved upon it, I have

nothing more to say. I shall find other time and place to adjust my differences with Master Richard Assheton."

"When you please, Sir," replied the young man, sternly.

"And I will answer for the propriety of the course I have pursued," said Sir Ralph, "but here comes Nicholas with Mother Demdike."

"Demdike taken! I am glad of it," cried Mother Chattox, slightly raising herself as she spoke. "Kill her, or she will 'scape you."

When Nicholas came up with the old hag, both Sir Ralph Assheton and Roger Nowell put several questions to her, but she refused to answer their interrogations, and, horrified by her blasphemies and imprecations, they caused her to be removed to a short distance, while a consultation was held as to the course to be pursued.

"We have made half-a-dozen of these miscreants prisoners," said Roger Nowell, "and the whole of them had better be taken to Whalley, where they can be safely confined in the old dungeons of the abbey, and after their examination on the morrow can be removed to Lancaster Castle."

"Be it so," replied Sir Ralph; "but must yon unfortunate lady," he added, pointing to Mistress Nutter, "be taken with them?"

"Assuredly," replied Nowell. "We can make no distinction among such offenders; or if there are any degrees in guilt, hers is of the highest class."

"You had better take leave of your daughter," said Sir Ralph to Mistress Nutter.

"I thank you for the hint," replied the lady. "Farewell, dear Alizon," she added, straining her to her bosom. "We must part for some time. Once more before I quit this world, in which I have played so wicked a part, I would fain look upon you — fain bless you, if I have the power — but this

must be at the last, when my trials are well-nigh over, and when all is about to close upon me!"

"Oh! must it be thus?" exclaimed Alizon, in a voice half suffocated by emotion.

"It must," replied her mother. "Do not attempt to shake my resolution, my sweet child — do not weep for me. Amidst all the terrors that surround me, I am happier now than I have been for years. I shall strive to work out my redemption by prayers."

"And you will succeed!" cried Alizon.

"Not so!" shrieked Mother Demdike; "the Fiend will have his own. She is bound to him by a compact which nought can annul."

"I should like to see the instrument," said Potts. "I might give a legal opinion upon it. Perhaps it might be avoided; and in any case its production in court would have an admirable effect. I think I see the counsel examining it, and hear the judges calling for it to be placed before them. His infernal Majesty's signature must be a curiosity in its way. Our gracious and sagacious monarch would delight in it."

"Peace!" exclaimed Nicholas; "and take care," he cried, "that no further interruptions are offered by that infernal hag. Have you done, Madam?" he added to Mistress Nutter, who still remained with her daughter folded in her arms.

"Not yet," replied the lady. "Oh! what happiness I have thrown away! What anguish — what remorse brought upon myself by the evil life I have led! As I gaze on this fair face, and think it might long, long have brightened my dark and desolate life with its sunshine — as I think upon all this, my fortitude well nigh deserts me, and I have need of support from on high to carry me through my trial. But I fear it will be denied me. Nicholas Assheton, you have the deed of gift

of Rough Lee in your possession. Henceforth Alizon is mistress of the mansion and domains."

"Provided always they are not forfeited to the crown, which I apprehend will be the case," suggested Potts.

"I will take care she is put in possession of them," said Nicholas.

"As to you, Richard," continued Mistress Nutter, "the time may come when your devotion to my daughter may be rewarded, and I could not bestow a greater boon upon you than by giving you her hand. It may be well I should give my consent now, and if no other obstacle should arise to the union, may she be yours, and happiness I am sure will attend you!"

Overpowered by conflicting emotions, Alizon hid her face in her mother's bosom, and Richard, who was almost equally overcome, was about to reply, when Mother Demdike broke upon them.

"They will never be united!" she screamed. "Never! I have said it, and my words will come true. Think'st thou a witch like thee can bless an union, Alice Nutter? Thy blessings are curses, thy wishes disappointments and despair. Thriftless love shall be Alizon's, and the grave shall be her bridal bed. The witch's daughter shall share the witch's fate."

These boding words produced a terrible effect upon the hearers.

"Heed her not, my sweet child— she speaks falsely," said Mistress Nutter, endeavouring to re-assure her daughter, but the tone in which the words were uttered showed that she herself was greatly alarmed.

"I have cursed them both, and I will curse them again," yelled Mother Demdike.

"Away with the old screech-owl," cried Nicholas. "Tak

her to the beacon, and if she continues troublesome, hurl her into the flame."

And notwithstanding the hag's struggles and imprecations she was removed.

"Whatever may betide, Alizon," cried Richard, "my life shall be devoted to you; and if you should not be mine, I will have no other bride. With your permission, Madam," he added, to Mistress Nutter, "I will take your daughter to Middleton, where she will find companionship and solace, I trust, in the attentions of my sister, who has the strongest affection for her."

"I could wish nothing better," replied the lady, "and now to put an end to this harrowing scene. Farewell, my child. Take her, Richard, take her," she cried, as she disengaged herself from the relaxing embrace of her daughter. "Now, Master Nowell, I am ready."

"It is well, Madam," he replied. "You will join the other prisoners, and we will set forth."

But at this juncture a terrific shriek was heard, which drew all eyes towards the beacon.

When Mother Demdike had been removed, in accordance with the squire's directions, her conduct became more violent and outrageous than ever, and those who had charge of her threatened, if she did not desist, to carry out the full instructions they had received, and cast her into the flames. The old hag defied them, and incensed them to such a degree by her violence and blasphemies, that they carried her to the very edge of the fire.

At this moment the figure of a monk, in mouldering white habiliments, came from behind the beacon, and stood beside the old hag. He slowly raised his hood and disclosed features that looked like those of the dead.

"Thy hour is come, accursed woman!" cried the phan-

tom, in thrilling accents. "Thy term on earth is ended, and thou shalt be delivered to unquenchable fire. The curse of Paslew is fulfilled upon thee, and will be fulfilled upon all thy viperous brood."

"Art thou the abbot's shade?" demanded the hag.

"I am thy implacable enemy," replied the phantom. "Thy judgment and thy punishment are committed to me. To the flames with her!"

Such was the awe inspired by the monk, and such the authority of his tones and gesture, that the command was unhesitatingly obeyed, and the witch was cast, shrieking, into the fire.

She was instantly swallowed up as in a gulf of flame, which raged, and roared, and shot up in a hundred lambent points, as if exulting in its prey.

The wretched creature was seen for a moment to rise up in it in extremity of anguish, with arms extended, and uttering a dreadful yell, but the flames wreathed round her, and she sank for ever.

When those who had assisted at this fearful execution looked around for the mysterious being who had commanded it they could nowhere behold him.

Then was heard a laugh of gratified hate — such a laugh as only a demon, or one bound to a demon, can utter, and the appalled listeners looked around, and beheld Mother Chattox standing behind them.

"My rival is gone!" cried the hag. "I have seen the last of her. She is burnt — ah! ah!"

Further triumph was not allowed her. With one accord, and as if prompted by an irresistible impulse, the men rushed upon her, seized her, and cast her into the fire.

Her wild laughter was heard for a moment above the roaring of the flames, and then ceased altogether.

Again the flame shot high in air, again roared and raged, again broke into a multitude of lambent points, after which it suddenly expired.

All was darkness on the summit of Pendle Hill.

And in silence and in gloom scarcely more profound than that weighing in every breast the melancholy troop pursued its way to Whalley.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

HOGHTON TOWER.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

Downham manor house.

On a lovely morning, about the middle of July, in the same year as the events previously narrated, Nicholas Assheton, always astir with the lark, issued from his own dwelling, and sauntered across the smooth lawn in front of it. The green eminence on which he stood was sheltered on the right by a grove of sycamores, forming the boundary of the park, and sloped down into a valley threaded by a small clear stream, whose murmuring as it danced over its pebbly bed, distinctly reached his ear in the stillness of early day. On the left, partly in the valley, and partly on the side of the acclivity on which the hall was situated, nestled the little village whose inhabitants owned Nicholas as lord; and to judge from their habitations, they had reason to rejoice in their master; for certainly there was a cheerful air about Downham which the neighbouring hamlets, especially those in Pendle Forest, sadly wanted.

On the left of the mansion, and only separated from it by the garden walls, stood the church, a venerable structure, dating back to a period more remote even than Whalley Abbey. From the church-yard a view, almost similar to that enjoyed by the squire, was obtained, though partially interrupted by the thick rounded foliage of a large tree, growing beneath it; and many a traveller who came that way lingered within the

hallowed precincts to contemplate the prospect. At the foot of the hill was a small stone bridge crossing the stream.

Across the road, and scarce thirty paces from the churchgate, stood a little ale-house, whose comfortable fireside nook and good liquors were not disdained by the squire. In fact, to his shame be it spoken, he was quite as often to be found there of an evening as at the hall. This had more particularly been the case since the house was tenanted by Richard Baldwyn, who, having given up the mill at Rough Lee, and taken to wife Bess Whitaker, of Goldshaw Booth, had removed with her to Downham, where he now flourished under the special protection of the squire. Bess had lost none of her old habits of command, and it must be confessed that poor Richard played a very secondary part in the establishment. Nicholas, as may be supposed, was permitted considerable licence by her, but even he had limits, which she took good care he should not exceed.

The Downham domains were well cultivated; the line of demarcation between them, and the heathy wastes adjoining, being clearly traced out, and you had only to follow the course of the brook to see at a glance where the purlieus of the forest ended, and where Nicholas Assheton's property commenced: the one being a dreary moor, with here and there a thicket upon it, but more frequently a dangerous morass, covered with sulphur-coloured moss; and the other consisting of green meadows, bordered, in most instances, by magnificent timber. The contrast, however, was not without its charm; and while the sterile wastes set off the fair and fertile fields around them, and enhanced their beauty, they offered a wide, uninterrupted expanse, over which the eye could range at will.

On the further side of the valley, and immediately opposite the lawn whereon Nicholas stood, the ground gradually arose, until it reached the foot of Pendle Hill, which here assuming

its most majestic aspect, constituted the grand and peculiar feature of the scene. Nowhere could the lordly eminence be seen to the same advantage as from this point, and Nicholas contemplated it with feelings of rapture, which no familiarity could diminish. The sun shone brightly upon its rounded summit, and upon its seamy sides, revealing all its rifts and ridges; adding depth of tint to its dusky soil, laid bare in places by the winter torrents; lending new beauty to its purple heath, and making its gray sod glow as with fire. So exhilarating was the prospect, that Nicholas felt half tempted to cross the valley and scale the hill before breaking his fast; but other feelings checked him, and he turned towards the right. Here, beyond a paddock and some outbuildings, lay the park, small in extent, but beautifully diversified, well stocked with deer, and boasting much noble timber. In the midst was an exquisite knoll, which, besides commanding a fine view of Pendle Hill, Downham, and all the adjacent country, brought within its scope, on the one hand, the ancient castle of Clithero and the heights overlooking Whalley, and, on the other, the lovely and extensive vale through which the Ribble wandered. This, also, was a favourite point of view with the squire, and he had some idea of walking towards it, when he was arrested by a person who came from the house, and who shouted to him, hoarsely but blithely, to stay.

The new-comer was a man of middle age, with a skin almost as tawny as a gipsey's, a hooked nose, black beetling brows, and eyes so strangely set in his head, that they communicated a sinister expression to his countenance. He possessed a burly frame, square, and somewhat heavy, though not so much so as to impede his activity. In deportment and stature, though not in feature, he resembled the squire himself; and the likeness was heightened by his habiliments being part of Nicholas's old wardrobe, the doublet and hose, and

even the green hat and boots, being those in which Nicholas made his first appearance in this history. The personage who thus condescended to be fed and clothed at the squire's expense, and who filled a situation something between guest and menial, without receiving the precise attentions of the one or the wages of the other, but who made himself so useful to Nicholas that he could not dispense with him — neither, perhaps, would he have been shaken off, even if it had been desired — was named Lawrence Fogg, an entire stranger to the country, whom Nicholas had picked up at Colne, and whom he had invited to Downham for a few weeks' hunting, and had never been able to get rid of him since.

Lawrence Fogg liked his quarters immensely, and determined to remain in them; and as a means to so desirable an end, he studied all the squire's weak points and peculiarities, and these not being very difficult to be understood, he soon mastered them, and mastered the squire into the bargain, but without allowing his success to become manifest. Nicholas was delighted to find one with tastes so congenial to his own, who was so willing to hunt or fish with him — who could train a hawk as well as Phil. Royle, the falconer — diet a fighting-cock as well as Tom Shaw, the cock-master — enter a hound better than Charlie Crouch, the old huntsman — shoot with the long-bow further than any one except himself, and was willing to toss off a pot with him, or sing a merry stave whenever he felt inclined. Such a companion was invaluable, and Nicholas congratulated himself upon the discovery, especially when he found Lawrence Fogg not unwilling to undertake some delicate commissions for him, which he could not well execute himself, and which he was unwilling should reach Mistress Assheton's ears. These were managed with equal adroitness and caution. About the same time, too, Nicholas, finding money scarce, and, not liking to borrow it in person,

delegated Fogg, and sent him round to his friends to ask for a loan; but, in this instance, the mission was attended with very indifferent success, for not one of them would lend him so small a sum as thirty pounds, all averring they stood in need of it quite as much as himself. Though somewhat inconvenienced by their refusal, Nicholas bore the disappointment with his customary equanimity, and made merry with his friend as if nothing had happened. Fogg showed an equal accommodating spirit in all religious observances, and, though much against his inclination, attended morning discourses and lectures with his patron, and even made an attempt at psalm-singing, but, on one occasion missing the tune and coming in with a bacchanalian chorus, he was severely rebuked by the minister, and enjoined to keep silence in future. Such was the friendly relation subsisting between the parties when they met together on the lawn on the morning in question.

"Well, Fogg," cried Nicholas, after exchanging salutations with his friend, "what say you to hunting the otter in the Ribble after breakfast? 'T is a rare day for the sport, and the hounds are in excellent order. There is an old dam and her litter, whom we must kill, for she has been playing the very devil with the fish for a space of more than two miles, and if we let her off for another week we shall have neither salmon, trout, nor umber, as all will have passed down the maws of her voracious brood."

"And that would be a pity, in good sooth, squire," replied Fogg; "for there are no fish like those of the Ribble. Nothing I should prefer to the sport you promise; but I thought you had other business for me to-day? Another attempt to borrow money — eh?"

"Ay, from my cousin, Dick Assheton," rejoined Nicholas; "he will lend me the thirty pounds, I am quite sure. But you had better defer the visit till to-morrow, when his father, Sir

Richard, will be at Whalley, and when you can have him to yourself. Dick will not say you nay, depend on 't; he is too good a fellow for that. A murrain on those close-fisted curmudgeons, Roger Nowell, Nicholas Townley, and Tom Whitaker. They ought to be delighted to oblige me."

"But they declare they have no money," said Fogg.

"No money! — pshaw!" exclaimed Nicholas; "an idle excuse. They have chests full. Would I had all Roger Nowell's gold, I should not require another supply for years. But, 'sdeath! I will not trouble myself for a paltry thirty pounds."

"If I might venture to suggest, squire, while you are about it, I would ask for a hundred pounds, or even two or three hundred," said Fogg. "Your friends will think all the better of you, and feel more satisfied you intend to repay them."

"Do you think so?" cried Nicholas. "Then, by Plutus, it shall be three hundred pounds — three hundred at interest. Dick will have to borrow the amount to lend it to me; but, no matter, he will easily obtain it. Harkye, Fogg, while you are at Middleton, endeavour to ascertain whether any thing has been arranged about the marriage of a certain young lady to a certain young gentleman. I am curious to know the precise state of affairs in that quarter."

"I will arrive at the truth, if possible, squire," replied Fogg, "but I should scarcely think Sir Richard would assent to his son's union with the daughter of a notorious witch."

"Sir Richard's son is scarcely likely to ask Sir Richard's consent," said Nicholas; "and as to Mistress Nutter, though heavy charges have been brought against her, nothing has been proved, for you know she escaped, or, rather, was rescued on her way to Lancaster Castle."

"I am fully aware of it, squire," replied Fogg, "and I more than suspect a worthy friend of mine had a hand in her deli-

verance, and could tell where to find her if needful. But that is neither here nor there. The lady is quite innocent, I dare say. Indeed, I am quite sure of it, since you espouse her cause so warmly. But the world is malicious, and strange things are reported of her."

"Heed not the world, Fogg," rejoined Nicholas. "The world speaks well of no man, be his deserts what they may. The world says that I waste my estate in wine, women, and horseflesh — that I spend time in pleasures which might be profitably employed — that I neglect my wife, forget my religious observances, am on horseback when I should be afoot, at the ale-house when I should be at home, at a marriage when I should be at a funeral, shooting when I should be keeping my books — in short, it has not a good word to say for me. And as for thee, Fogg, it says thou art an idle, good-for-nothing fellow; or if thou art good for aught, it is only for something that leads to evil. It says thou drinkest prodigiously, liest confoundedly, and swearest most profanely; that thou art ever more ready to go to the ale-house than to church, and that none of the girls can 'scape thee. Nay, the slanderers even go so far as to assert thou wouldst not hesitate to say, 'Stand and deliver!' to a true man on the highway. That is what the world says of thee. But, hang it! never look chap-fallen, man. Let us go to the stables, and then we will in to breakfast; after which we will proceed to the Ribble, and spear the old otter."

A fine old manorial residence was Downham, and beautifully situated, as has been shown, on a woody eminence to the north of Pendle Hill. It was of great antiquity, and first came into the possession of the Assheton family in 1558. Considerable additions had been made to it by its present owner, Nicholas, and the outlay necessarily required, combined with his lavish expenditure, had contributed to embarrass him.

The stables were large, and full of horses; the kennels on the same scale, and equally well supplied with hounds; and there was a princely retinue of servants in the yard — grooms, keepers, falconers, huntsmen, and their assistants — to say nothing of their fellows within doors. In short, if it had been your fortune to accompany the squire and his friend round the premises — if you had walked through the stables and counted the horses — if you had viewed the kennels and examined the various hounds — the great Lancashire dogs, tall, shaggy, and heavy, a race now extinct; the Worcestershire hounds, then also in much repute; the greyhounds, the harriers, the beagles, the lurchers, and, lastly, the verminers, or, as we should call them, the terriers,—if you had seen all these, you would not have wondered that money was scarce with him. Still further would your surprise at such a consequence have diminished if you had gone on to the falconry, and seen on the perches the goshawk and her tercel, the sparrow-hawk and her musket, under the care of the ostringer; and further on the falcon-gentle, the gerfalcon, the lanner, the merlin, and the hobby, all of which were attended to by the head falconer. It would have done you good to hear Nicholas inquiring from his men if they had "set out their birds that morning, and weathered them;" if they had mummy powder in readiness, then esteemed a sovereign remedy; if the lures, hoods, jesses, buets, and all other needful furniture were in good order; and if the meat were sweet and wholesome. You might next have followed him to the pens, where the fighting-cocks were kept, and where you would have found another source of expense in the cock-master, Tom Shaw — a knave who not only got high wages from his master, but understood so well the dieting of his birds that he could make them win or lose a battle as he thought proper. Here, again, Nicholas had much to say, and was in raptures with one cock, which he told Fogg he would

back to any amount, utterly unconscious of a significant look that passed between his friend and the cock-master.

"Look at him," cried the squire; "how proud and erect he stands. His head is as small as that of a sparrow-hawk, his eye large and quick, his body thick, his leg strong in the beam, and his spurs long, rough, and sharp. That is the bird for me. I will take him over to the cock-pit at Prescot next week, and match him against any bird Sir John Talbot, or my cousin Braddyll, can bring."

"And yo'n win, squoire," replied the cock-master; "ey ha' been feedin' him these five weeks, so he'll be i' rare condition then, and winna fail yo. Yo may lay what yo loike upon him," he added, with a sly wink at Fogg.

"You may win the thirty pounds you want," observed the latter, in a low tone to the squire.

"Or, mayhap, lose it," replied Nicholas. "I shall not risk so much, unless I get the three hundred from Dick Assheton. I have been unlucky of late. You beat me constantly at tables now, Fogg, and when I first knew you this was not wont to be the case. Nay, never make any excuses, man; you cannot help it. Let us in to breakfast."

With this, he proceeded towards the house, followed by Fogg, and a couple of large Lancashire hounds, and entering at the back of the premises, made his way through the scullery into the kitchen. Here there were plentiful evidences of the hospitality, not to say profusion, reigning throughout the mansion. An open door showed a larder stocked with all kinds of provisions, and before the fire, joints of meat and poultry were roasting. Pies were baking in the oven; and over the flames, in the chimney, was suspended a black pot large enough for a witch's cauldron. The cook was busied in preparing for the gridiron some freshly-caught trout, intended for the squire's own breakfast; and a kitchen-maid was

toasting oat cakes, of which there was a large supply in the bread-flake depending from the ceiling.

Casting a look around, and exchanging a few words with the cook, Nicholas moved on, still followed by Fogg and the hounds, and tracking a long stone passage, entered the great hall. Here the same disorder and irregularity prevailed as in his own character and conduct. All was litter and confusion. Around the walls were hung breast-plates and buff coats, morions, shields, and two-handed swords; but they were half hidden by fishing-nets, fowling-nets, dogs' collars, saddles and bridles, housings, cross-bows, long bows, quivers, baldricks, horns, spears, guns, and every other implement then used in the sports of the river or the field. The floor was in an equal state of disorder. The rushes were filled with half-gnawed bones, brought thither by the hounds; and in one corner, on a mat, was a favourite spaniel and her whelps. The squire, however, was, happily, insensible to the condition of the chamber, and looked around it with an air of satisfaction, as if he thought it the perfection of comfort.

A table was spread for breakfast, near a window looking out upon the lawn, and two covers only were laid, for Mistress Nicholas Assheton did not make her appearance at this early hour. And now was exhibited one of those strange contradictions of which the squire's character was composed. Kneeling down by the side of the table, and without noticing the mocking expression of Fogg's countenance as he followed his example, Nicholas prayed loudly and fervently for upwards of ten minutes, after which he arose and gave a shout which proved that his lungs were unimpaired, and, not only roused the whole house, but set all the dogs barking.

Presently, a couple of serving-men answered this lusty summons, and the table was covered with good and substantial dishes, which he and his companion attacked with a

vigour such as only the most valiant trencherman can display. Already has it been remarked that a breakfast at the period in question resembled a modern dinner; and better proof could not have been afforded of the correctness of the description than the meal under discussion, which comprised fish, flesh, and fowl, boiled, broiled, and roast, together with strong ale and sack. After an hour thus agreeably employed, and while they were still seated, though breakfast had pretty nearly come to an end, a serving-man entered, announcing Master Richard Sherborne,of Dunnow. The squire instantly sprang to his feet, and hastened to welcome his brother-in-law.

"Ah! good day to you, Dick," he cried, shaking him heartily by the hand; "what happy chance brings you here so early? But first sit down and eat — eat, and talk afterwards. Here, Roger, Harry, bring another platter and napkin, and let us have more broiled trout, and a cold capon — a pasty, or whatever you can find in the larder. Try some of this gammon meanwhile, Dick. It will help down a can of ale. And now what brings thee hither, lad? Pressing business, no doubt. Thou mayst speak before Fogg. I have no secrets from him. He is my second self."

"I have no secrets to divulge, Nicholas," replied Sherborne, "and I will tell you at once what I am come about. Have you heard that the King is about to visit Hoghton Tower in August?"

"No; this is news to me," replied Nicholas; "does your business relate to his visit?"

"It does," replied Sherborne. "Last night a messenger came to me from Sir Richard Hoghton, entreating me to move you to do him the favour and courtesy to attend him at the King's coming, and wear his livery."

"I wear his livery!" exclaimed Nicholas, indignantly. "'Sdeath! what do you take me for, cousin Dick?"

"For a right good fellow, who I am sure will comply with his friend's request, especially when he finds there is no sort of degradation in it," replied Sherborne. "Why I shall wear Sir Richard's cloth, and so will several others of our friends. There will be rare doings at Hoghton — masquings, mummings, and all sorts of revels, besides hunting, shooting, racing, wrestling, and the devil knows what. You may feast and carouse to your heart's content. The Dukes of Buckingham and Richmond will be there, and the Earls of Nottingham and Pembroke and Sir Gilbert Hoghton, the King's great favourite, who married the Duchess of Buckingham's sister. Besides these, you will have all the beauty of Lancashire. I would not miss the sight for thirty pounds."

"Thirty pounds!" echoed Nicholas, as if struck with a sudden thought. "Do you think Sir Thomas Hoghton would lend me that sum if I consent to wear his cloth, and attend him?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Sherborne; "and if he won't, I will."

"Then I will put my pride in my pocket, and go," said Nicholas. "And now, Dick, dispatch your breakfast as quickly as you can, and then I will take you to the Ribble, and show you some sport with an otter."

Sherborne was not long in concluding his repast, and having received an otter spear from the squire, who had already provided himself and Fogg with like weapons, all three adjourned to the kennels, where they found the old huntsman, Charlie Crouch, awaiting them, attended by four stout varlets, armed with forked staves, meant for the double purpose of beating the river's banks, and striking the poor beast they were about to hunt, and each man having a couple of hounds, well entered for the chase, in leash. Old Crouch was a thin, grey-bearded fellow, but possessed of a tough muscular frame,

which served him quite as well in the long run as the younger and apparently more vigorous limbs of his assistants. His cheek was hale, and his eye still bright and quick, and a certain fierceness was imparted to his countenance by a large aquiline nose. He was attired in a greasy leathern jerkin, tight hose of the same material, and had a bugle suspended from his neck, and a sharp hunting-knife thrust into his girdle. In his hand he bore a spear like his master, and was followed by a grey old lurcher, who, though wanting an ear and an eye, and disfigured by sundry scars on throat and back, was hardy, untiring, and sagacious. This ancient dog was called Grip, from his tenacity in holding any thing he set his teeth upon, and he and Crouch were inseparable.

Great was the clamour occasioned by the squire's appearance in the yard. The coupled hounds gave tongue at once, and sang out most melodiously, and all the other dogs within the kennels, or roaming at will about the yard, joined the concert. After much swearing, cracking of whips, and yelping consequent upon the cracking, silence was in some degree restored, and a consultation was then held between Nicholas and Crouch as to where their steps should first be bent. The old huntsman was for drawing the river near a place called Bean Hill Wood, as the trees thereabouts, growing close to the water's edge, it was pretty certain the otter would have her couch amid the roots of some of them. This was objected to by one of the varlets, who declared that the beast lodged in a hollow tree, standing on a bank nearly a mile higher up the stream, and close by the point of junction between Swanside Beck and the Ribble. He was certain of the fact, he avouched, because he had noticed her marks on the moist grass near the tree.

"Hoo goes theere to fish, mon?" cried Crouch, "for it is the natur o' the wary varmint to feed at a distance fro' her

lodgin, boh ey'm sure we shan leet on her among the roots o' them big trees o'erhanging th' river near Bean Hill Wood, an if the squire 'll tay my advice, he'n go theere first."

"I put myself entirely under your guidance, Crouch," said Nicholas.

"An yo'n be aw reet, Sir," replied the huntsman; "we'n beat the bonks weel, an two o' these chaps shan go up the stream, an two down, one o' one side, and one o' t'other; an i' that manner hoo canna escape us, fo' Grip can swim an dive os weel os onny otter i' aw Englondshiar, an he'n be efter her an her litter the moment they tak to t'wotur. Some folk, os maybe yo ha' seen, squoire, tak howd on a cord by both eends, an droppin it into t'river, draw it slowly along, so that they can tell by th'jerk when th'otter touches it; boh this is an onsartin method, an is nowt like Grip's plan, for wherever yo see him swimmin, t'other beast yo may be sure is nah far ahead."

"A brave dog, but confoundedly ugly!" exclaimed the squire, regarding the old one-eared, one-eyed lurcher, with mingled admiration and disgust; "and now that all is arranged, let us be off."

Accordingly, they quitted the court-yard, and, shaping their course in the direction indicated by the huntsman, entered the park, and proceeded along a glade, chequered by the early sunbeams. Here the noise they made in their progress speedily disturbed a herd of deer browsing beneath the trees, and as the dappled foresters darted off to a thicker covert, great difficulty was experienced by the varlets in restraining the hounds, who struggled eagerly to follow them, and made the welkin resound with their baying.

"Yonder is a tall fellow," cried Nicholas, pointing out a noble buck to Crouch; "I must kill him next week, for I want to send a haunch of venison to Middleton, and another to Whalley Abbey for Sir Ralph."

"Better hunt him, squoire," said Crouch; "he will gi' ye good sport."

Soon after this they attained an eminence, where a charming sweep of country opened upon them, including the finest part of Ribblesdale, with its richly-wooded plains, and the swift and beautiful river from which it derived its name. The view wâs enchanting, and the squire and his companions paused for a moment to contemplate it, and then stepping gleefully forward, made their way over the elastic turf towards a small thicket skirting the park. All were in high spirits, for the freshness and beauty of the morning had not been without effect; and the squire's tongue kept pace with his legs, as he strode briskly along; but as they entered the thicket in question, and caught sight of the river through the trees, the old huntsman enjoined silence, and he was obliged to put a check upon his loquacity.

When within a bowshot from the water, the party came to a halt, and two of the men were directed by Crouch to cross the stream at different points, and then commence beating the banks, while the other two were ordered to pursue a like course, but to keep on the near side of the river. The hounds were next uncoupled, and the men set off to execute the orders they had received, and soon afterwards the crashing of branches, and the splashing of water, accompanied by the deep baying of the hounds, told they were at work.

Meanwhile, Nicholas and the others had not remained idle. As the varlets struck off in different directions, they went straight on, and forcing their way through the brushwood, came to a high bank overlooking the Ribble, on the top of which grew three or four large trees, whose roots, laid bare on the further side by the swollen currents of winter, formed a convenient resting-place for the fish-loving creature they hoped to surprise. Receiving a hint from Crouch to make for

the central tree, Nicholas grasped his spear, and sprang forward; but, quick as he was, he was too late, though he saw enough to convince him that the crafty old huntsman had been correct in his judgment; for a dark slimy object dropped from out the roots of the tree beneath him, and glided into the water as swiftly and as noiselessly as if its skin had been oiled. A few bubbles rose to the surface of the water, but these were all the indications marking the course of the wondrous diver.

But other eyes, sharper than those of Nicholas, were on the watch, and the old huntsman shouted out, "There hoo goes, Grip — efter her, lad, efter her!" The words were scarcely uttered when the dog sprang from the top of the bank and sank under the water. For some seconds no trace could be observed of either animal, and then the shaggy nose of the lurcher was seen nearly fifty yards higher up the river, and after sniffing around for a moment, and fixing his single eye on his master, who was standing on the bank, and encouraging him with his voice and gesture, he dived again.

"Station yourselves on the bank fifty paces apart," cried Crouch; "run, run, or yo'n be too late, an' strike os quick os leet if yo've a chance. Stay wheere you are, squoire," he added, to Nicholas. "Yo canna be better placed."

All was now animation and excitement. Perceiving from the noise that the otter had been found, the four varlets hastened towards the scene of action, and, by their shouts and the clatter of their staves, contributed greatly to its spirit. Two were on one side of the stream, and two on the other, and up to this moment the hounds were similarly separated; but now most of them had taken to the water, some swimming about, others standing up to the middle in the shallower part of the current, watching with keen gaze for the appearance of their anticipated victim.

Having descended the bank, Nicholas had so placed him-

self among the huge twisted roots of the tree, that if the otter, alarmed by the presence of so many foes, and unable to escape either up or down the river, should return to her couch, he made certain of striking her. At first, there seemed little chance of such an occurrence, for Fogg, who had gone a hundred yards higher up, suddenly dashed into the stream, and, plunging his spear into the mud, cried out that he had hit the beast; but the next moment, when he drew the weapon forth, and exhibited a large rat which he had transfixed, his mistake excited much merriment.

Old Crouch, meantime, did not suffer his attention to be drawn from his dog. Every now and then he saw him come to the surface to breathe, but as he kept within a short distance, though rising at different points, the old huntsman felt certain the otter had not got away, and having the utmost reliance npon Grip's perseverance and sagacity, he felt confident he would bring the quarry to him if the thing were possible. The varlets kept up an incessant clatter, beating the water with their staves, and casting large stones into it, while the hounds bayed furiously, so that the poor fugitive was turned on whichever side she attempted a retreat.

While this was going on, Nicholas was cautioned by the huntsman to look out, and scarcely had the admonition reached him than the sleek shining body of the otter emerged from the water and wreathed itself among the roots. The squire instantly dealt a blow which he expected to prove fatal, but his mortification was excessive when he found he had driven the spear-head so deeply into the tree that he could scarcely disengage it, while an almost noiseless plunge told that his prey had escaped. Almost at the same moment that the poor hunted beast had sought its old lodging, the untiring lurcher had appeared at the edge of the bank, and as the former again went down he dived likewise.

Secretly laughing at the squire's failure, the old huntsman prepared to take advantage of a similar opportunity if it should present itself, and with this view ensconced himself behind a pollard willow, which stood close beside the stream, and whence he could watch closely all that passed, without being exposed to view. The prudence of the step was soon manifest. After the lapse of a few seconds, during which neither dog nor otter had risen to breathe, a slight, very slight, undulation was perceptible on the surface of the water. Crouch's grasp tightened upon his staff — he waited another moment — then dashed forward, struck down his spear, and raised it aloft, with the poor otter transfixed and writhing upon its point.

Loudly and exultingly did the old man shout at his triumph, and loudly were his vociferations answered by the others. All flew to the spot where he was standing, and the hounds, gathering round him, yelled furiously at the otter, and showed every disposition to tear her in pieces, if they could get at her. Kicking the noisiest and fiercest of them out of the way, Crouch approached the river's brink, and lowered the spear-head till it came within reach of his favourite Grip, who had not yet come out of the water, but stood within his depth, with his one red eye fixed on the enemy he had so hotly pursued, and fully expecting his reward. It now came; his sharp teeth instantly met in the otter's throat, and when Crouch swung them both in the air, he still maintained his hold, showing how well he deserved his name, nor could he be disengaged until long after the sufferings of the tortured animal had ceased.

To say that Nicholas was neither chagrined at his ill success, nor jealous of the old huntsman's superior skill, would be to affirm an untruth; but he put the best face he could upon the matter, and praised Grip very highly, alleging that the whole merit of the hunt rested with him. Old Crouch let

him go on, and when he had done, quietly observed that the otter they had destroyed was not the one they came in search of, as they had seen nothing of her litter; and that, most likely, the beast that had done so much mischief had her lodging in the hollow tree near the Swanside Beck, as described by the varlet, and he wished to know whether the squire would like to go and hunt her. Nicholas replied that he was quite willing to do so, and hoped he should have better luck on the second occasion; and with this they set forward again, taking their way along the side of the stream, beating the banks as they went, but without rousing any thing beyond an occasional water-rat, which was killed almost as soon as found by Grip.

Somehow or other, without any one being aware of what led to it, the conversation fell upon the two old witches, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, and the strange manner in which their career had terminated on the summit of Pendle Hill — if, indeed, it could be said to have terminated, when their spirits were reported to haunt the spot, and might be seen, it was asserted, at midnight, flitting round the beacon, and shrieking dismally. The restless shades were pursued, it was added, by the figure of a monk in white mouldering robes, supposed to be the ghost of Paslew. It was difficult to understand how these apparitions could be witnessed, since no one, even for a reward, could be prevailed upon to ascend Pendle Hill after nightfall; but the shepherds affirmed they had seen them from below, and that was testimony sufficient to shake the most sceptical. One singular circumstance was mentioned, which must not be passed by without notice; and this was that when the cinders of the extinct beacon-fire came to be examined, no remains whatever of the two hags could be discovered, though the ashes were carefully sifted, and it was quite certain that the flames had expired long before

their bodies could be consumed. The explanation attempted for this marvel was, that Satan had carried them off while yet living, to finish their combustion in a still more fiery region.

Mention of Mother Demdike naturally led to her grandson, Jem Device, who, having escaped in a remarkable manner on the night in question, notwithstanding the hue and cry made after him, had not, as yet, been captured, though he had been occasionally seen at night, and under peculiar circumstances, by various individuals, and amongst others by old Crouch, who, however, declared he had been unable to lay hands upon him.

Allusion was then made to Mistress Nutter, whereupon it was observed that the squire changed the conversation quickly, while sundry sly winks and shrugs were exchanged among the varlets of the kennel, seeming to intimate that they knew more about the matter than they cared to admit. Nothing more, however, was elicited than that the escort conducting her to Lancaster Castle, together with the other witches, after their examination before the magistrates at Whalley, and committal, had been attacked, while it was passing through a woody defile in Bowland Forest, by a party of men in the garb of foresters, and the lady set free. Nor had she been heard of since. What made this rescue the more extraordinary was, that none of the other witches were liberated at the same time, but some of them who seemed disposed to take advantage of the favourable interposition, and endeavoured to get away, were brought back by the foresters to the officers of justice; thus clearly proving that the attempt was solely made on Mistress Nutter's account, and must have been undertaken by her friends. Nothing, it was asserted, could equal the rage and mortification of Roger Nowell and Potts, on learning that their chief prey

had thus escaped them, and by their directions, for more than a week, the strictest search was made for the fugitive throughout the neighbourhood, but without effect — no clue could be discovered to her retreat. Suspicion naturally fell upon the two Asshetons, Nicholas and Richard, and Roger Nowell roundly taxed them with contriving and executing the enterprise in person; while Potts told them they were guilty of misprision of felony, and threatened them with imprisonment for life, forfeiture of goods and of rents, for the offence; but as the charge could not be proved against them, notwithstanding all the efforts of the magistrate and attorney, it fell to the ground; and Master Potts, full of chagrin at this unexpected and vexatious termination of the affair, returned to London, and settled himself in his chambers in Chancery Lane. His duties, however, as clerk of the court, would necessarily call him to Lancaster in August, when the assizes commenced, and when he would assist at the trials of such of the witches as were still in durance.

From Mother Demdike it was natural that the conversation should turn to her weird retreat, Malkin Tower; and Richard Sherborne expressed his surprise that the unhallowed structure should be suffered to remain standing after her removal. Nicholas said he was equally anxious with his brother-in-law for its demolition, but it was not so easily to be accomplished as it might appear, for the deserted structure was in such ill repute with the common folk, as well as every one else, that no one dared approach it, even in the day time. A boggart, it was said, had taken possession of its vaults, and scared away all who ventured near it; sometimes showing himself in one frightful shape, and sometimes in another; now as a monstrous goat, now as an equally monstrous cat, uttering fearful cries, glaring with fiery eyes from out of the windows,

or appearing in all his terror on the summit of the tower. Moreover, the haunted structure was frequently lighted up at dead of night, strains of unearthly music were heard resounding from it and wild figures were seen flitting past the windows, as if engaged in dancing and revelry; so that it appeared that no alteration for the better had taken place there, and that things were still quite as improperly conducted now, as they had been in the time of Mother Demdike, or in those of her predecessors, Isole de Heton and Blackburn, the robber. The common opinion was, that Satan and all his imps had taken up their abode in the tower, and as they liked their quarters, led a jolly life there, dancing and drinking all night long, it would be useless at present to give them notice to quit, still less to attempt to pull down the house about their ears. Richard Sherborne heard this wondrous relation in silence, but with a look of incredulity; and when it was done he winked slily at his brother-in-law. A strange expression, half comical, half suspicious, might also have been observed on Fogg's countenance; and he narrowly watched the squire as the latter spoke.

"But with the disappearance of the malignant old hags who had so long infested the neighbourhood had all mischief and calamity ceased, or were people as much afflicted as heretofore? Were there, in short, so many cases of witchcraft, real or supposed?" This was the question next addressed by Sherborne to Nicholas. The squire answered decidedly there were not. Since the burning of the two old beldames, and the imprisonment of the others, the whole district of Pendle had improved. All those who had been smitten with strange illnesses had recovered, and the inhabitants of the little village of Sabden, who had experienced the fullest effects of their malignity, were entirely free from sickness. And not only had they and their families suddenly

regained health and strength, but all belonging to them had undergone a similar beneficial change. The kine that had lost their milk now yielded it abundantly; the lame horse halted no longer; the murrain ceased among the sheep; the pigs that had grown lean amidst abundance fattened rapidly; and though the farrows that had perished during the evil ascendancy of the witches could not be brought back again, their place promised speedily to be supplied by others. The corn blighted early in the year had sprung forth anew, and the trees nipped in the bud were laden with fruit. In short, all was as fair and as flourishing as it had recently been the reverse. Amongst others, John Law, the pedlar, who had been deprived of the use of his limbs by the damnable arts of Mother Demdike, had marvellously recovered on the very night of her destruction, and was now as strong and as active as ever.

"Such happy results having followed the removal of the witches, it was to be hoped," Sherborne said, "that the riddance would be complete, and that none of the obnoxious brood would be left to inflict future miseries on their fellows. This could not be the case so long as James Device was allowed to go at large, nor while his mother, Elizabeth Device, a notorious witch, was suffered to escape with impunity. There was also Jennet, Elizabeth's daughter, a mischievous and ill-favoured little creature, who inherited all the ill qualities of her parents. These were the spawn of the old snake, and until they were entirely exterminated, there could be no security against a recurrence of the evil. Again, there was Nance Redferne, old Chattox's grand-daughter, a comely woman enough, but a reputed witch, and an undoubted fabricator of clay images. She was still at liberty, though she ought to be with the rest in the dungeons of Lancaster Castle. It was useless to allege that with the destruction of the old

hags all danger had ceased. Common prudence would keep the others quiet now, but the moment the storm passed over, they would resume their atrocious practices, and all would be as bad as ever. No, no! — the tree must be utterly uprooted, or it would inevitably burst forth anew."

With these opinions Nicholas generally concurred, but he expressed some sympathy for Nance Redferne, whom he thought far too good-looking to be as wicked and malicious as represented. But however that might be, and however much he might desire to get rid of the family of the Devices he feared such a step might be attended with danger to Alizon, and that she might in some way or other be implicated with them. This last remark he addressed in an undertone to his brother-in-law. Sherborne did not at first feel any apprehension on that score, but, on reflection, he admitted that Nicholas was, perhaps, right; and though Alizon was now the recognised daughter of Mistress Nutter, yet her long and intimate connection with the Device family might operate to her prejudice, while her near relationship to an avowed witch would not tend to remove the unfavourable impression. Sherborne then went on to speak in the most rapturous terms of the beauty and goodness of the young girl who formed the subject of their conversation, and declared he was not in the least surprised that Richard Assheton was so much in love with her. And yet, he added, a most extraordinary change had taken place in her since the dreadful night on Pendle Hill, when her mother's guilt had been proclaimed, and when her arrest had taken place as an offender of the darkest dye. Alizon, he said, had lost none of her beauty, but her light and joyous expression of countenance had been supplanted by a look of profound sadness, which nothing could remove. Gentle and meek in her deportment, she seemed to look upon herself as under a ban,

and as if she were unfit to associate with the rest of the world. In vain Richard Assheton and his sister endeavoured to remove this impression by the tenderest assiduities; in vain they sought to induce her to enter into amusements consistent with her years; she declined all society but their own, and passed the greater part of her time in prayer. Sherborne had seen her so engaged, and the expression of her countenance, he declared, was seraphic.

On the extreme verge of a high bank situated at the point of junction between Swanside Beck and the Ribble, stood an old, decayed oak. Little of the once mighty tree, beyond the gnarled trunk, was left, and this was completely hollow, while there was a great rift near the bottom through which a man might easily creep, and when once in, stand erect without inconvenience. Beneath the bank, the river was deep and still, forming a pool, where the largest and fattest fish were to be met with. In addition to this, the spot was extremely secluded, being rarely visited by the angler on account of the thick copse by which it was surrounded, and which extended along the back from the point of confluence between the lesser and the larger stream to Downham mill, nearly half a mile distant.

The sides of the Ribble were here, as elsewhere, beautifully wooded, and as the clear stream winded along through banks of every diversity of shape and character, and covered by forest trees of every description, and of the most luxuriant growth, the effect was enchanting; the more so, that the sun, having now risen high in the heavens, poured down a flood of summer heat and radiance, that rendered these cool shades inexpressibly delightful. Pleasant was it, as the huntsmen leaped from stone to stone to listen to the sound of the waters rushing past them. Pleasant as they sprang upon some green holm or fairy islet, standing in the midst of the stream, and

dividing its lucid waters, to suffer the eye to follow the course of the rapid current, and to see it here sparkling in the bright sunshine, there plunged in shade by the overhanging trees — now fringed with osiers and rushes, now embanked with smoothest sward of emerald green; anon defended by steep rocks, sometimes bold and bare, but more frequently clothed with timber; then sinking down, by one of those sudden but exquisite transitions which nature alone dares display, from this savage and sombre character into the softest and gentlest expression; everywhere varied, yet everywhere beautiful.

Through such scenes of sylvan loveliness had the huntsmen passed on their way to the hollow oak, and they had ample leisure to enjoy them, because the squire and his brother-in-law being engaged in conversation, as before related, made frequent pauses, and, during these, the others halted likewise; and even the hounds, glad of a respite, stood still, or amused themselves by splashing about amid the shallows without any definite object, unless of cooling themselves. Then, as the leaders once more moved forward, arose the cheering shout, the loud, deep bay, the clattering of staves, the crashing of branches, and all the other inspiriting noises accompanying the progress of the hunt. But for some minutes these had again ceased, and as Nicholas and Sherborne lingered beneath the shade of a wide-spread beech tree growing on a sandy hillock, near the stream, and seemed deeply interested in their talk — as well they might, for it related to Alizon — the whole troop, including Fogg, held respectfully aloof, and awaited their pleasure to go on.

The signal to move was, at length, given by the squire, who saw they were now not more than a hundred yards from the bank on which stood the hollow tree they were anxious to reach. As the river here made a turn, and swept round the point in question, forming, owing to this detention, the deep

pool previously mentioned, the bank almost faced them, and as nothing intervened, they could almost look into the rift near the base of the tree, forming, they supposed, the entrance to the otter's couch. But, though this was easily distinguished, no traces of the predatory animal could be seen, and though many sharp eyes were fixed upon the spot during the prolonged discourse of the two gentlemen, nothing had occurred to attract their attention, and to prove that the object of their quest was really there.

After some little consultation between the squire and Crouch, it was agreed that the former should alone force his way to the tree, while the others were to station themselves with the hounds at various points of the stream, above and below the bank, so that if the otter and her litter escaped their first assailant, they should infallibly perish by the hands of some of the others. This being agreed upon, the plan was instantly put into execution — two of the varlets remaining where they were — two going higher up; while Sherborne and Fogg stationed themselves on great stones in the middle of the stream, whence they could command all around them, and Crouch, wading on with Grip, planted himself at the entrance of Swanside Beck into the Ribble.

Meanwhile, the squire having scaled the bank, entered the thick covert encircling it, and, not without some damage to his face and hands from the numerous thorns and brambles growing amongst it, forced his way upwards until he reached the bare space surrounding the hollow tree; and this attained, his first business was to ascertain that all was in readiness below before commencing the attack. A glance showed him on one side Old Crouch standing up to his middle in the beck, grasping his long otter spear, and with Grip beating the water in front of him in anxious expectation of employment; and in front Fogg, Sherborne, and two of the varlets, with their

hounds so disposed that they could immediately advance upon the otter if it plunged into the river, while its passage up or down would be stopped by their comrades. All this he discerned at a glance, and comprehending from a sign made him by the old huntsman that he should not delay, he advanced towards the tree, and was about to plunge his spear into the hole, hoping to transfix one at least of its occupants, when he was startled by hearing a deep voice apparently issue from the hollows of the timber, bidding him "beware!"

Nicholas recoiled aghast, for he thought it might be Hobthurst, or the demon of the wood, who thus bespoke him.

"What accursed thing addresses me?" he said, standing on his guard. "What is it? Speak!"

"Get hence, Nicholas Assheton," replied the voice; "an' meddle not wi' them os meddles not wi' thee."

"Aha!" exclaimed the squire, recovering courage, for he thought this did not sound like the language of a demon. "I am known, am I? Why should I go hence, and at whose bidding?"

"Ask neaw questions, mon, boh ge," replied the voice, "or it shan be warse fo' thee. Ey am the boggart o' th' clough, an' if theaw bringst me out, ey'n tear thee i' pieces wi' my claws, an' cast thee into t' Ribble, so that thine own hounts shan eat thee up."

"Ha! say'st thou so, master boggart," cried Nicholas. "For a spirit, thou usest the vernacular of the county fairly enough. But before trying whether thy hide be proof against mortal weapons, I command thee to come forth and declare thyself, that I may judge what manner of thing thou art."

"Thoud'st best lem me be, ey tell thee," replied the boggart, gruffly.

"Ah! methinks I should know those accents," exclaimed the squire; "they marvellously resemble the voice of an offen-

der who has too long evaded justice, and whom I have now fairly entrapped. Jem Device, thou art known, lad, and if thou dost not surrender at discretion, I will strike my spear through this rotten tree, and spit thee as I would the beast I came in quest of."

"An' which yo wad more easily hit than me!" retorted Jem. And suddenly springing from the hole at the foot of the tree, he passed between the squire's legs, with great promptitude, and flinging him face foremost upon the ground, crawled to the edge of the bank, and thence dropped into the deep pool below.

The plunge roused all the spectators, who, though they had heard what had passed, and had seen the squire upset in the manner described, had been so much astounded that they could render no assistance; but they now, one and all, bestirred themselves actively to seize the diver when he should rise to the surface. But though every eye was on the look out, and every arm raised; though the hounds were as eager as their masters, and yelling fiercely, swam round the pool, ready to pounce upon the swimmer as upon a duck, all were disappointed; for, even after a longer interval than their patience could brook, he did not appear.

By this time, Nicholas had regained his legs, and infuriated by his discomfiture, approached the edge of the bank, and peering down below, hoped to detect the fugitive immediately beneath him, resolved to show him no mercy when he caught him. But he was equally at fault with the others, and after more than five minutes spent in ineffectual search, he ordered Crouch to send Grip into the pool.

The old keeper replied that the dog was not used to this kind of chase, and might not display his usual skill in it, but as the squire would take no nay, he was obliged to consent, and the other hounds were called off, lest they should puzzle him.

Twice did the shrewd lurcher swim round the pool, sniffing the air, after which he approached the shore, and scented close to the bank; but still it was evident he could detect nothing, and Nicholas began to despair, when the dog suddenly dived. Expectation was then raised to the utmost, and all were on the watch again, Nicholas leaning over the edge of the bank with his spear in hand, prepared to strike; but the dog was so long in re-appearing, that all had given him up for lost, and his master was giving utterance to ejaculations of grief and rage, and vowing vengeance against the warlock, when Grip's grisly head was once more seen above the surface of the water, and this time he had a piece of blue serge in his jaws, proving that he had had hold of the raiments of the fugitive, and that therefore the latter could not be far off, but had most probably got into some hole beneath the bank.

No sooner was this notion suggested than it was acted by the old huntsman and Fogg, and, wading forward, they pricked the bank with their spears at various points below the level of the water. All at once, Fogg fell forward. His spear had entered a hole, and had penetrated so deeply, that he had lost his balance. But though soused over head and ears, he had made a successful hit, for the next moment Jem Device appeared above the water, and ere he could dive again his throat was seized by Grip, and while struggling to free himself from the fangs of the tenacious animal, he was laid hold of by Crouch, and the varlets rushing forward to the latter's assistance, the ruffian was captured.

Some difficulty was experienced in rescuing the captive from the jaws of the hounds, who, infuriated by his struggles, and perhaps mistaking him for some strange beast of chase, made their sharp teeth meet in various parts of his person, rending his garments from his limbs, and would no doubt have rent the flesh also, if they had been permitted. At length,

after much fighting and struggling, mingled with yells and vociferations, Jem was borne ashore, and flung on the ground, where he presented a wretched spectacle; bleeding, half-drowned, and covered with slime acquired during his occupation of the hole in the bank. But though unable to offer further resistance, his spirit was not quelled, and his eye glared terribly at his captors. Fearing they might have further trouble with him when he recovered from his present exhausted condition, Crouch had his hands bound tightly together with one of the dog-leashes, and then would fain have questioned him as to how he managed to breathe in a hole below the level of the water; but Jem refused to satisfy his curiosity, and returned only a sullen rejoinder to any questions addressed to him, until the squire, who had crossed the river at some stepping-stones lower down, came up, and the ruffian then inquired, in a half-menacing tone, what he meant to do with him?

"What do I mean to do with you?" cried Nicholas. "I will tell you, lad. I shall send you at once to Whalley to be examined before the magistrates; and as the proofs are pretty clear against you, you will be forwarded without any material delay to Lancaster Castle."

"An yo winna rescue me by the way, os yo ha dun a sartin notorious witch an murtheress!" replied Jem, fiercely. "Tak heed whot yo dun, squoire. If ey speak at aw, ey shan speak out, and to some purpose, ey'n warrant ye. If ey ge to Lonkester Castle, ey winna ge alone. Wan o' yer friends shan ge wi' me."

"Cursed villain! I guess thy meaning," replied Nicholas; "but thy vindictive purposes will be frustrated. No credence will be attached to thy false charges; while as to the lady thou aimest at, she is luckily beyond reach of thy malice."

"Dunna be too sure o' that, squoire," replied Jem. "Ey

con put t' officers o' jestis os surely on her track os owd Crouch could set these hounds on an otter. Lay yer account on it, ey winna dee unavenged."

"Heed him not," interposed Sherbone, seeing that the squire was shaken by his threat, and taking him apart; "it will not do to let such a villain escape. He can do you no injury, and as to Mistress Nutter, if you know where she is, it will be easy to give her a hint to get out of the way."

"I don't know that," replied Nicholas, thoughtfully.

"If ey might be so bowd os offer my advice, squoire," said old Crouch, advancing towards his master, "ey'd tee a heavy stoan round the felly's throttle, an chuck him into t' poo', an' he'n tell no teles fo' all his bragging."

"That would silence him effectually, no doubt, Crouch," replied Nicholas, laughing, "but a dog's death is too good for him, and besides I am pretty sure his destiny is not drowning. No, no — at all risks he shall go to Whalley. Harkee, Fogg," he added, beckoning that worthy to him, "I commit the conduct and custody of the prisoner to you. Clap him on a horse, get on another yourself, take these four varlets with you, and deliver him into the hands of Sir Ralph Assheton, who will relieve you of all further trouble and responsibility. But you may add this to the baronet from me," he continued, in an under-tone. "I recommend him to place under immediate arrest Elizabeth Device, the prisoner's mother, and her daughter Jennet. You understand, Fogg — eh?"

"Perfectly," returned the other, with a somewhat singular look; "and your instructions shall be fulfilled to the letter. Have you any thing more to commit to me?"

"Only this," said Nicholas; "you may tell Sir Ralph that I propose to sleep at the Abbey to-night. I shall ride over to Middleton in the course of the day, to confer with Dick Assheton upon what has just occurred, and get the money

from him — the three hundred pounds, you understand — and when my errand is done, I will turn bridle towards Whalley. I shall return by Todmorden, and through the Gorge of Cliviger. You may as well tarry for me at the Abbey, for Sir Ralph will be glad of thy company, and we can return together to Downham to-morrow."

As the squire thus spoke, he noticed a singular sparkle in Fogg's ill-set eyes; but he thought nothing of it at the time, though it subsequently occurred to his recollection.

Meanwhile, the prisoner, finding no grace likely to be shown him, shouted out to the squire, that if he were set free, he would make certain important disclosures to him respecting Fogg, who was not what he represented himself; but Nicholas treated the offer with disdain; and the individual mainly interested in the matter, who appeared highly incensed by Jem's malignity, cut a short peg by way of gag, and, thrusting it into the ruffian's mouth, effectually checked any more revelations on his part.

Fogg then ordered the varlets to bring on the prisoner; but as Jem obstinately refused to move, they were under the necessity of taking him on their shoulders, and transporting him in this manner to the stables, where he was placed on a horse, as directed by the squire.

CHAPTER II.

The penitent's retreat.

Nicholas and Sherborne returned by a different road from that taken by the others, and loitered so much by the way that they did not arrive at the manor-house until the prisoner and his escort had set out. Probably this was designed, as Nicholas seemed relieved when he learnt they were gone. Having entered the house with his brother-in-law, and

conducted him to an apartment opening out of the hall, usually occupied by Mistress Assheton, and where, in fact, they found that amiable lady employed at her embroidery, he left Sherborne with her, and making some excuse for his own hasty retreat, betook himself to another part of the house.

Mounting the principal staircase, which was of dark oak, with richly-carved railing, he turned into a gallery communicating with the sleeping apartments, and, after proceeding more than half way down it, halted before a door, which he unlocked, and entered a spacious but evidently disused chamber, hung round with faded tapestry, and containing a large, gloomy-looking bedstead. Securing the door carefully after him, Nicholas raised the hangings in one corner of the room, and pressing against a spring, a sliding panel flew open. A screen was placed within, so as to hide from view the inmate of the secret chamber, and Nicholas, having coughed slightly, to announce his presence, and received an answer in a low, melancholy female voice, stepped through the aperture, and stood within a small closet.

It was tenanted by a lady, whose features and figure bore the strongest marks of affliction. Her person was so attenuated that she looked little more than a skeleton — her fingers were long and thin — her cheeks hollow and deathly pale — her eyes lustreless and deep sunken in their sockets — and her hair, once jetty as the raven's wing, prematurely blanched. Such was the profound gloom stamped upon her countenance, that it was impossible to look upon her without compassion, while, in spite of her wo-begone looks, there was a noble character about her that elevated the feeling into deep interest, blended with respect. She was kneeling beside a small desk, with an open Bible laid upon it, which she was intently studying when the squire appeared.

"Here is a terrible text for you, Nicholas," she said,

regarding him, mournfully. "Listen to it, and judge of its effect on me. Thus it is written in Deuteronomy: — 'There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.' A witch, Nicholas — do you mark the word? And yet more particular is the next verse, wherein it is said: — 'Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.' And then cometh the denunciation of divine anger against such offenders, in these awful words: — 'For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.' Again, it is said in Leviticus, that 'the Lord setteth his face against such, to cut them off.' And in Exodus, the law is expressly laid down thus — 'THOU SHALT NOT SUFFER A WITCH TO LIVE.' There is no escape for her, you see. By the divine command she must perish, and human justice must carry out the decree. Nicholas, I am one of the offenders thus denounced, thus condemned. I have practised witchcraft, consulted with familiar spirits, and done other abominations in the sight of heaven; and I ought to pay the full penalty of my offences."

"Do not, I beseech you, Madam," replied the squire, "continue to take this view of your case. However you have sinned, you have made amends by the depth and sincerity of your repentance. Your days and nights — for you allow yourself only such rest as nature forces on you, and take even that most unwillingly — are passed in constant prayer. Your abstinence is severer than any anchoress ever practised, for I am sure for the last month you have not taken as much food altogether as I consume in a day; while, not content with this, you perform acts of penance that afflict me beyond measure to think upon, and which I have striven in vain to induce you to

forego. There will be no occasion to deliver yourself up to justice, Madam; for, if you go on thus, and do not deal with yourself a little more mildly, your accounts with this world will be speedily settled."

"And I should rejoice to think so, Nicholas," replied Mistress Nutter, "if I had any hope in the world to come. But, alas! I have none. I cannot, by any act of penitence and contrition, expiate my offences. My soul is darkened by despair. I know I ought to give myself up — that heaven and man alike require my life, and I cannot reconcile myself to avoiding my just doom."

"It is the Evil One who puts these thoughts into your head," replied Nicholas, "and who fills your heart with promptings of despair that he may again obtain the mastery over it. But take a calmer and more consolatory view of your condition. Human justice may require a public sacrifice as an example, but Heaven will be satisfied with contrition in secret."

"I trust so," replied the lady, vainly striving to draw comfort from his words. "Oh, Nicholas! you do not know the temptations I am exposed to in this chamber — the difficulty I experience in keeping my thoughts fixed on one object — the distractions I undergo — the mental obscurations — the faintings of spirit — the bodily prostration — the terrors, the inconceivable terrors that assail me. Sometimes I wish my spirit would flee away, and be at rest. Rest! there is none for me — none in the grave — none beyond the grave — and therefore I am afraid of death, and still more of the judgment after death! Man might inflict all the tortures he could devise upon this poor frame. I would bear them all with patience, with delight, if I thought they would purchase me immunity hereafter! But with the dread conviction, the almost certainty,

hat it will be otherwise, I can only look to the final consummation with despair!"

"Again I tell you these suggestions are evil," said Nicholas. "The Son of God, who sacrificed himself for man, and by whose atonement all mankind hope for salvation, has assured us that the greatest sinner who repents shall be forgiven, and, indeed, is more acceptable in the eyes of Heaven than him who has never erred. Far be it from me to attempt to exculpate you in your own eyes, or extenuate your former criminality. You have sinned deeply, so deeply that you may well shrink aghast from the contemplation of your past life — may well recoil in abhorrence from yourself, — and may fitly devote yourself to constant prayer and acts of penitence. But having cast off your iniquity and sincerely repented, I bid you hope — I bid you place a confident reliance in the clemency of an all-merciful power."

"You give me much comfort, Nicholas," said the lady, "and if tears of blood can wash away my sin they shall be shed; but much as you know of my wickedness, even you cannot conceive its extent. In my madness, for it was nothing else, I cast off all hopes of Heaven, renounced my Redeemer, was baptized by the demon, and entered into a compact by which — I shudder to speak it — my soul was surrendered to him."

"You placed yourself in fearful jeopardy no doubt," rejoined Nicholas, "but you have broken the contract in time, and an all-righteous judge will not permit the penalty of the bond to be exacted. Seeing your penitence, Satan has relinquished all claim to your soul."

"I do not think it," replied the lady. "He will contest the point to the last, and it is only at the last that it will be decided."

As she spoke a sound like mocking laughter reached the ears of Nicholas.

"Did you hear that?" demanded Mistress Nutter, in accents of wildest terror. "He is ever on the watch. I knew it — I knew it."

Clasping her hands together, and fixing her looks on high, she then addressed the most fervent supplications to Heaven for deliverance from evil, and ere long her troubled countenance began to resume its former serenity, proving that the surest balm for a "mind diseased" is prayer. Her example had been followed by Nicholas, who, greatly alarmed, had dropped upon his knees likewise, and now arose with somewhat more composure in his demeanour and aspect.

"I am sorry I do not bring you good news, Madam," he said, "but Jem Device has been arrested this morning, and as the fellow is greatly exasperated against me, he threatens to betray your retreat to the officers; and though he is, probably, unacquainted with it, notwithstanding his boasting, still he may cause search to be made, and, therefore, I think you had better be removed to some other hiding-place."

"Deliver me up without more ado, I pray you, Nicholas," said the lady.

"You know my resolution on that point, Madam," he replied, "and, therefore, it is idle to attempt to shake it. For your daughter's sake, if not for your own, I will save you, in spite of yourself. You would not fix a brand for ever on Alizon's name — you would not destroy her?"

"I would not," replied the wretched lady. "But have you heard from her — have you seen her? Tell me, is she well and happy?"

"She is well, and would be happy, were it not for her anxiety about you," replied Nicholas, evasively. "But for her sake — mine — your own — I must urge you to seek some

other place of refuge to night, for if you are discovered here you will bring ruin on us all."

"I will no longer debate the point," replied Mistress Nutter. "Where shall I go?"

"There is one place of absolute security, but I do not like to mention it," replied Nicholas. "Yet still as it will only be necessary to remain for a day or two, till the search is over, when you can return here, it cannot much matter."

"Where is it?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"Malkin Tower," answered the squire, with some hesitation.

"I will never go to that accursed place," cried the lady. "Send me hence, when you will — now, or at midnight, and let me seek shelter on the bleak fells, or on the desolate moors, but bid me not go there!"

"And yet it is the best and safest place for you," returned Nicholas, somewhat testily; "and for this reason, that being reputed to be haunted, no one will venture to molest you. As to Mother Demdike, I suppose you are not afraid of her ghost, and if the evil beings you apprehend were able or inclined to do you mischief, they would not wait till you got there, to execute their purpose."

"True," said Mistress Nutter, "I was wrong to hesitate. I will go."

"You will be as safe there as here, ay, and safer," rejoined Nicholas, "or I would not urge the retreat upon you. I am about to ride over to Middleton this morning to see your daughter and Richard Assheton, and shall sleep at Whalley, so that I shall not be able to accompany you to the tower to-night, but old Crouch, the huntsman, shall be in waiting for you, as soon as it grows dusk, in the summer-house, with which, as you know, the secret staircase connected with this room communicates, and he shall have a horse in readiness to

take you, together with such matters as you may require, to the place of refuge. Heaven guard you, Madam!"

"Amen!" responded the lady.

"And, now, farewell!" said Nicholas. "I shall hope to see you back again ere many days be gone, when your quietude will not again be disturbed."

So saying, he stepped back, and passing through the panel, closed it after him.

CHAPTER III.

Middleton Hall.

MIDDLETON HALL, the residence of Sir Richard Assheton, was a large quadrangular structure, built entirely of timber, and painted externally in black and white chequer-work, fanciful and varied in design, in the style peculiar to the better class of Tudor houses in South Lancashire and Cheshire. Surrounded by a deep moat, supplied by a neighbouring stream, and crossed by four drawbridges, each faced by a gateway, this vast pile of building was divided into two spacious courts, one of which contained the stables, barns, and offices, while the other was reserved for the family and the guests by whom the hospitable mansion was almost constantly crowded. In the last-mentioned part of the house was a great gallery, with deeply embayed windows filled with painted glass, a floor of polished oak, walls of the same dark lustrous material, hung with portraits of stiff beauties, some in ruff and farthingale, and some in a costume of an earlier period, among whom was Margaret Barton, who brought the manor of Middleton into the family; frowning warriors, beginning with Sir Ralph Assheton, Knight marshal of England in the reign of Edward IV., and surnamed "the black of Assheton-under-line," the founder of the house, and husband of Margaret Barton before men-

tioned, and ending with Sir Richard Assheton, grandfather of the present owner of the mansion, and one of the heroes of Flodden; grave lawyers, or graver divines — a likeness running through all, and showing they belonged to one line — a huge carved mantelpiece, massive tables of walnut or oak, and black and shining as ebony, set round with high-backed chairs. Here, also, above stairs there were long corridors looking out through lattices upon the court, and communicating with the almost countless dormitories, while, on the floor beneath, corresponding passages led to all the principal chambers, and terminated in the grand entrance-hall, the roof of which being open and intersected by enormous rafters, and crooks of oak, like the ribs of some "tall ammiral," was thought from this circumstance, as well as from its form, to resemble "a ship turned upside down." The lower beams were elaborately carved and ornamented with gilded bosses and sculptured images, sustaining shields emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the Asshetons. As many as three hundred matchlocks, in good and serviceable condition, were ranged round the entrance-hall, besides corslets, Almayne rivets, steel caps, and other accoutrements: this stand of arms having been collected by Sir Richard's predecessor, during the military muster made in the country in 1574, when he had raised and equipped a troop of horse for Queen Elizabeth. Outside the mansion was a garden, charmingly laid out in parterres and walks, and not only carried to the edge of the moat, but continued beyond it till it reached a high knoll crowned with beech trees. A crest of tall twisted chimneys, a high roof with quaintly carved gables, surmounted by many gilt vanes, may serve to complete the picture of Middleton Hall.

On a lovely summer evening, two young persons of opposite sexes were seated on a bench placed at the foot of one of the largest and most umbrageous of the beech trees crown-

ing the pleasant eminence before mentioned; and though differing in aspect and character, the one being excessively fair, with tresses as light and fleecy as the clouds above them, and eyes as blue and tender as the skies, and the other distinguished by great manly beauty, though in a totally different style; still there was a sufficiently strong likeness between them, to proclaim them brother and sister. Profound melancholy pervaded the countenance of the young man, whose handsome brow was clouded by care, while the girl, though sad, seemed so only from sympathy.

They were conversing together in deep and earnest tones, showing how greatly they were interested, and as they proceeded many an involuntary sigh was heaved by Richard Assheton, while a tear more than once dimmed the brightness of his sister's eyes, and her hand sought by its gentle pressure to re-assure him.

They were talking of Alizon, of her peculiar and distressing situation, and of the young man's hopeless love for her. She was the general theme of their discourse, for Richard's sole comfort was in pouring forth his griefs into his sister's willing ear; but new causes of anxiety had been given them by Nicholas, who had arrived that afternoon, bringing intelligence of James Device's capture, and of his threats against Mistress Nutter. The squire had only just departed, having succeeded in the twofold object of his visit, which was, firstly, to borrow three hundred pounds from his cousin, and, secondly, to induce him to attend the meeting at Hoghton Tower. With the first request Richard willingly complied, and he assented, though with some reluctance, to the second, provided nothing of serious moment should occur in the interim. Nicholas tried to rally him on his despondency, endeavouring to convince him all would come right in time, and that his misgivings were causeless; but his arguments

were ineffectual, and he was soon compelled to desist. The squire would fain, also, have seen Alizon, but understanding she always remained secluded in her chamber till even-tide, he did not press the point. Richard urged him to stay over the night, alleging the length of the ride, and the speedy approach of evening, as inducements to him to remain; but on this score the squire was resolute, and having carefully secured the large sum of money he had obtained beneath his doublet, he mounted his favourite steed, Robin, who seemed as fresh as if he had not achieved upwards of thirty miles that morning, and rode off.

Richard watched him cross the drawbridge, and take the road towards Rochdale, and after exchanging a farewell wave of the hand with him, returned to the hall, and sought out his sister.

Dorothy was easily persuaded to take a turn in the garden with her brother, and during their walk he confided to her all he had heard from Nicholas. Her alarm at Jem Device's threat was much greater than his own; and, though she entertained a strong and unconquerable aversion to Mistress Nutter, and could not be brought to believe in the sincerity of her penitence, still, for Alizon's sake, she dreaded lest any harm should befal her, and more particularly desired to avoid the disgrace which would be inflicted by a public execution. Alizon, she was sure, would not survive such a catastrophe, and therefore, at all risks, it must be averted.

Richard did not share, to the same extent, in her apprehensions, because he had been assured by Nicholas that Mistress Nutter would be removed to a place of perfect security, and because he was disposed, with the squire, to regard the prisoner's threats as mere ravings of impotent malice. Still he could not help feeling great uneasiness. Vague fears, too, beset him, which he found it in vain to shake off, but he did

not communicate them to his sister, as he knew the terrifying effect they would have upon her timid nature; and he, therefore, kept the mental anguish he endured to himself, hoping ere long it would diminish in intensity. But in this he was deceived, for, instead of abating, his gloom and depression momently increased.

Almost unconsciously, Richard and his sister had quitted the garden, proceeding with slow and melancholy steps to the beech-crowned knoll. The seat they had chosen was a favourite one with Alizon, and she came thither on most evenings, either accompanied by Dorothy or alone. Here it was that Richard had more than once passionately besought her to become his bride, receiving on both occasions a same meek yet firm refusal. To Dorothy also, who pleaded her brother's cause with all the eloquence and fervour of which she was mistress, Alizon replied that her affections were fixed upon Richard, but that while her mother lived, and needed her constant prayers, they must not be withheld; and that looking upon any earthly passion as a criminal interference with this paramount duty, she did not dare to indulge it. Dorothy represented to her that the sacrifice was greater than she was called upon to make, that her health was visibly declining, and that she might fall a victim to her over-zeal; but Alizon was deaf to her remonstrances, as she had been to the entreaties of Richard.

With hearts less burthened, the contemplation of the scene before them could not have failed to give delight to Richard and his sister, aud even amid the adverse circumstances under which it was viewed its beauty and tranquillity produced a soothing influence.

Evening was gradually stealing on, and all the exquisite tints marking that delightful hour were spreading over the landscape. The sun was setting gorgeously, and a flood of

radiance fell upon the old mansion beneath them, and upon the gray and venerable church, situated on a hill adjoining it. The sounds were all in unison with the hour, and the lowing of cattle, the voices of the husbandmen returning from their work, mingled with the cawing of the rooks newly alighted on the high trees near the church, told them that bird, man and beast were seeking their home for the night. But though Richard's eye dwelt upon the fair garden beneath him, embracing all its terraces, green slopes, and trim pastures; though it fell upon the moat belting the hall like a glittering zone; though it rested upon the church tower; and roaming over the park beyond it, finally settled upon the range of hills bounding the horizon, which have not inaptly been termed the English Apennines; though he saw all these things, he thought not of them, neither was he conscious of the sounds that met his ear, and which all spoke of rest from labour, and peace. Darker and deeper grew his melancholy. He began to persuade himself he was not long for this world, and while gazing upon the beautiful prospect before him, was, perhaps, looking upon it for the last time.

For some minutes Dorothy watched him anxiously, and at last receiving no answer to her questions, and alarmed by the expression of his countenance, she flung her arms round his neck, and burst into tears. It was now Richard's turn to console her, and he inquired with much anxiety, as to the cause of this sudden outburst of grief.

"You yourself are the cause of it, dear Richard," replied Dorothy, regarding him with brimming eyes, "I cannot bear to see you so unhappy. If you suffer this melancholy to grow upon you, it will affect both mind and body. Just now, your countenance wore an expression most distressing to look upon. Try to smile, dear Richard, if only to cheer me, or else I shall grow as sad as you. Ah, me! I have known the

day, and not long since either, when on a pleasant summer evening like this you would propose a stroll into the park with me; and, when there, would trip along the glades as fleetly as a deer, and defy me to catch you. But you always took care I should, though — ha! ha! Come, there is a little attempt at a smile. That 's something. You look more like yourself now. How happy we used to be in those days, to be sure! — and how merry! You would make the courts ring with your blithe laughter, and well nigh kill me with your jests. If love is to make one mope like an owl, and sigh like the wind through a half-shut casement; if it is to cause one to lose one's rosy complexion and gay spirit; and forget how to dance and sing — take no pleasure in hawking and hunting, or any kind of sport — walk about with eyes fixed upon the ground, muttering, and with disordered attire — if it is to make one silent when one should be talkative, grave when one should be gay, heedless when one should listen — if it is to do all this, defend me from the tender passion! I hope I shall never fall in love."

"I hope you never will, dear Dorothy," replied Richard, pressing her hand affectionately, "if your love is to be attended with such unhappy results as mine. I know not how it is, but I feel unusually despondent this evening, and am haunted by a thousand dismal fancies. But I will do my best to dismiss them, and with your help no doubt I shall succeed."

"There! — there was a smile in earnest!" cried Dorothy, brightening up. "Oh, Richard! I am quite happy now. And, after all, I do not see why you should take such a gloomy view of things. I have no doubt there is a great deal, a very great deal, of happiness in store for you and Alizon — I must couple her name with your's, or you will not allow it to be happiness — if you can only be brought to think so. I am

quite sure of it; and you shall see how nicely I can make the matter out. As thus. Mistress Nutter is certain to die soon — such a wicked woman cannot live long. Don't be angry with me for calling her wicked, Richard, but you know I never can forget her unhallowed proceedings in the convent church at Whalley, where I was so nearly becoming a witch myself. Well, as I was saying, she cannot live long, and when she goes — and Heaven grant it may be soon! — Alizon, no doubt, will mourn for her, though I shall not, and after a decent interval — then, Richard, then she will no longer say you nay, but will make you happy as your wife. Nay, do not look so sad again, dear brother. I thought I should make you quite cheerful by the picture I was drawing."

"It is because I fear it will never be realised that I am sad, Dorothy," replied Richard. "My own anticipations are the opposite of yours, and paint Alizon sinking into an early grave before her mother; while, as to myself, if such be the case, I shall not long survive her."

"Nay, now you will make me weep again," cried Dorothy, her tears flowing afresh. "But I will not allow you to indulge such gloomy ideas, Richard. If I seriously thought Mistress Nutter likely to occasion all this fresh mischief I would cause her to be delivered up to justice, and hanged out of the way. You may look cross at me, but I would. What is an old witch like her, compared with two young, handsome persons, dying for love of each other, and yet not able to marry on her account?"

"Dorothy, Dorothy, you must put some restraint on your tongue," said Richard; "you give it sadly too much licence. You forget it is the wish of the unhappy lady you refer to, to expiate her offences at the stake, and that it is only out of consideration to her daughter that she has been induced to remain in concealment. What will be the issue of it all, I

dare scarcely conjecture. Wo to her, I fear. Wo to Alizon. Wo to me!"

"Alas! Richard, that you should link yourself to her fate!" exclaimed Dorothy, half mournfully, half reproachfully.

"I cannot help it," he replied. "It is my destiny — a deplorable destiny, if you will — but not to be avoided. That Mistress Nutter will escape the consequences of her crimes, I can scarcely believe. Her penitence is profound and sincere, and that is a great consolation, for I trust she will not perish body and soul. I should wish her to have some spiritual assistance, but this Nicholas will not for the present permit, alleging that no churchman would consent to screen her from justice when he became aware, as he must by her confession, of the nature and magnitude of her offences. This may be true, but when the wretches who have been leagued with her in iniquity are disposed of, the reason will no longer exist, and I will see that she is cared for. But apart from her mother, I have another source of anxiety respecting Alizon. It is this: orders have been this day given for the arrest of Elizabeth Device, and her daughter, Jennet, and Alizon will be the chief witness against them. This will be a great trouble to her."

"Undoubtedly," rejoined Dorothy, with much concern. "But can it not be avoided?"

"I fear not," said Richard, "and I blamed Nicholas much for his precipitancy in giving the order; but he replied he had been held up latterly as a favourer of witches, and must endeavour to redeem his character by a display of severity. Were it not for Alizon, I should rejoice that the noxious brood should at last be utterly exterminated."

"And so should I, in good sooth," responded Dorothy. "As to Elizabeth Device, she is bad enough for any thing,

and capable of almost any mischief: but she is nothing to Jennet, who, I am persuaded, would become a second Mother Demdike, if her career were not cut short. You have seen the child, and know what an ill-favoured, deformed little creature she is, with round high shoulders, eyes set strangely in her face, and such a malicious expression — oh! I shudder to think of it."

And she covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out some unpleasant object.

"Poor predestined child of sin, branded by nature from her birth, and charged with wicked passions, as the snake with venom, I cannot but pity her!" exclaimed Richard. "Compassion is entirely thrown away," he added, with a sudden change of manner, and as if trying to shake off a weakness. "The poisonous fruit must, however, be nipped in the bud. Better she should perish now, even though comparatively guiltless, than hereafter, with a soul stained with crime, like her mother."

As he concluded, he put his hand quickly to his side, for a sharp and sudden pang shot through his heart; and so acute was the pain that, after struggling against it for a moment, he groaned deeply, and would have fallen, if his sister, greatly alarmed, and with difficulty repressing a scream, had not lent him support.

Neither of them were aware of the presence of a little girl, who had approached the place where they were sitting, with footsteps so light that the grass scarcely seemed to bend beneath them, and who, ensconcing herself behind the tree, drank in their discourse with eager ears. She was attended by a large black cat, who, climbing the tree, placed himself on a bough above her.

During the latter part of the conversation, and when it turned upon the arrest of Jennet and her mother, the expres-

sion of the child's countenance, malicious enough to begin with, became desperately malignant, and she was only restrained by certain signs from the cat, which appeared to be intelligible to her, from some act of mischief. At last, even this failed, and before the animal could descend and check her, she crept round the bole of the tree, so as to bring herself close to Richard, and muttering a spell, made one or two passes behind his back, touched him with the point of her finger, but so lightly that he was unconscious of the pressure, and then hastily retreated with the cat, who glared furiously at her from his flaming orbs.

It was at the moment she touched him that Richard felt as if an arrow were quivering in his heart.

Poor Dorothy's alarm was so great that she could not even scream for assistance, and she feared if she quitted her brother he would expire before her return; but the agony, though great, was speedily over, and as the spasm ceased, he looked up, and, with a faint smile, strove to re-assure her.

"Do not be alarmed," he said; "it is nothing — a momentary faintness — that is all."

But the damp upon his brow, and the deathly hue of his cheek, contradicted the assertion, and showed how much he had endured.

"It was more than momentary faintness, dear Richard," replied Dorothy. "It was a frightful seizure — so frightful that I almost feared — but no matter — you know I am easily alarmed. Thank God! here is some colour coming into your cheeks. You are better now, I see. Lean upon me, and let us return to the house."

"I can walk unassisted," said Richard, rising with an effort.

"Do not despise my feeble aid," replied Dorothy, taking his arm under her own. "You will be quite well soon."

"I am quite well now," said Richard, halting after he had advanced a few paces. "The attack is altogether passed. Do you not see Alizon coming towards us? Not a word of this sudden seizure to her. Do you mind, Dorothy?"

Alizon was soon close beside them, and though, in obedience to Richard's injunctions, no allusion was made to his recent illness, she at once perceived he was suffering greatly, and with much solicitude inquired into the cause. Richard avoided giving a direct answer, and immediately entering upon Nicholas's visit, tried to divert her attention from himself.

So great a change had been wrought in Alizon's appearance and manner during the last few weeks that she could scarcely be recognised. Still beautiful as ever, her beauty had lost its earthly character, and had become in the highest degree spiritualised and refined. Humility of deportment and resignation of look, blended with an expression of religious fervour, gave her the appearance of one of the early martyrs. Unremitting ardour in the pursuance of her devotional exercises by day, and long vigils at night, had worn down her frame, and robbed it of some of its grace and fulness of outline; but this attenuation had a charm of its own, and gave a touching interest to her figure, which was wanting before. If her cheek was thinner and paler, her eyes looked larger and brighter, and more akin to the stars in splendour; and if she appeared less childlike, less joyous, less free from care, the want of these qualities was more than counterbalanced by increased gentleness, resignation, and serenity.

Deeply interested in all Richard tole her of her mother, she was greatly concerned to hear of the intended arrest of Elizabeth and Jennet Device, especially the latter. For this unhappy and misguided child she had once entertained the

affection of a sister, and it could not but be a source of grief to her to reflect upon her probable fate.

Little more passed between them, for Richard, feeling his strength again fail him, was anxious to reach the house, and Dorothy was quite unequal to conversation. They parted at the door, and as Alizon, after taking leave of her friends, turned to continue her walk in the garden, Richard staggered into the entrance-hall, and sank upon a chair.

Alizon desired to be alone, for she did not wish to have a witness to the grief that overpowered her, and which, when she had gained a retired part of the garden, where she supposed herself free from all observation, found relief in a flood of tears.

For some minutes she was a prey to violent and irrepressible emotion, and had scarcely regained a show of composure, when she heard herself addressed, as she thought, in the voice of the very child whose unlucky fate she was deploring. Looking round in surprise, and seeing no one, she began to think fancy must have cheated her, when a low malicious laugh, arising from a shrubbery near her, convinced her that Jennet was hidden there. And the next moment the little girl stepped from out the trees.

Alizon's first impulse, was to catch the child in her arms, and press her to her bosom, but there was something in Jennet's look that deterred her, and so embarrassed her, that she was unable to bestow upon her the ordinary greeting of affection, or even approach her.

Jennet seemed to enjoy her confusion, and laughed spitefully.

"Yo dunna seem ower glad to see me, sister Alizon," said Jennet, at length.

"*Sister* Alizon!" There was something in the term that now jarred upon the young girl's ears, but she strove to conquer the feeling, as unworthy of her.

"She was once my sister," she thought, "and shall be so still. I will save her, if it be possible. Jennet," she added, aloud, "I know not what chance brings you here, and though I may not give you the welcome you expect, I am rejoiced to see you, because I may be the means of serving you. Do not be alarmed at what I am going to tell you. The danger, I hope, is passed, or, at all events, may be avoided. Your liberty is threatened, and at the very moment I see you here I was lamenting your supposed condition as a prisoner."

Jennet laughed louder and more spitefully than before, and looked so like a little fury that Alizon's blood ran cold at the sight of it.

"Ey knoa it aw, sister Alizon," she cried, "an that is why ey ha cum'd here. Brother Jem is a pris'ner i' Whalley Abbey. Mother is a pris'ner theere too. An ey should ha kept em company, if Tib hadna brought me off. Now, listen to me, Alizon, fo' this is my bus'ness wi' yo. Yo mun get mother an Jem out to-neet — eigh, to-neet. Yo con do it, if yo win. An onless yo do — boh ey winna threaten till ey get yer answer."

"How am I to set them free?" asked Alizon, greatly alarmed.

"Yo need only say the word to young Ruchot Assheton, an the job 's done," replied Jennet.

"I refuse — positively refuse to do so," rejoined Alizon, indignantly.

"Varry weel," cried Jennet, with a look of concentrated malice and fury; "then tak the consequences. They win be ta'en to Lonkester Castle, an lose their lives theere. Boh ye shan go too — ay, an be brunt os a witch — a witch — d'ye mark, wench? eh!"

"I defy your malice!" cried Alizon.

"Defy me!" screamed Jennet. "What, ho! Tib!"

And at the call the huge black cat sprang from out the shrubbery.

"Tear her flesh from her bones!" cried the little girl, pointing to Alizon, and stamping furiously on the ground.

Tib erected his back, and glared like a tiger, but he seemed unwilling, or unable to obey the order.

Alizon, who had completely recovered her courage, regarded him fixedly, and apparently without terror.

"Whoy dusna seize her, an tear her i' pieces?" cried the infuriated child.

"He dares not — he has no power over me," said Alizon. "Oh, Jennet! cast him off. Your wicked agent appears to befriend you now, but he will lead you to certain destruction. Come with me, and I will save you."

"Off!" cried Jennet, repelling her with furious gestures. "Off! ey winna ge wi' ye. Ey winna be saved, os yo term it. Ey hate yo more than ever, an wad strike yo dead at my feet, if ey could. Boh as ey conna do it, ey win find some other means o' injurin' ye. Soh look to yersel, proud ledy — look to yersel! Ey ha already smitten you in a place where ye win feel it sore, an ey win repeat the blow. Ey now leave yo, boh we shan meet again. Come along, Tib!"

So saying, she sprang into the shrubbery, followed by the cat, leaving Alizon appalled by her frightful malignity.

CHAPTER IV.

The Gorge of Cliviger.

The sun had already set as Nicholas Assheton reached Todmorden, then a very small village indeed, and alighting at a little inn near the church, found the ale so good, and so many boon companions assembled to discuss it, that he would fain have tarried with them for an hour or so; but prudence, for once, getting the better of inclination, and suggesting that he had fifteen or sixteen miles still to ride, over a rough and lonely road, part of which lay through the Gorge of Cliviger, a long and solitary pass among the English Apennines, and, moreover, had a large sum of money about him, he tore himself away by a great effort.

On quitting the smiling valley of Todmorden, and drawing near the dangerous defile before mentioned, some misgivings crossed him, and he almost reproached himself with foolhardiness in venturing within it at such an hour, and wholly unattended. Several recent cases of robbery, some of them attended by murder, had occurred within the pass; and these now occurred so forcibly to the squire, that he was half inclined to ride back to Todmorden, and engage two or three of the topers he had left at the inn to serve him as an escort as far as Burnley, but he dismissed the idea almost as soon as formed, and, casting one look at the green and woody slopes around him, struck spurs into Robin, and dashed into the gorge.

On the right towered a precipice, on the bare crest of which stood a heap of stones piled like a column — the remains probably, of a cairn. On this commanding point Nicholas perceived a female figure, dilated to gigantic proportions against the sky, who, as far as he could distinguish,

seemed watching him, and making signs to him, apparently to go back, but he paid little regard to them, and soon afterwards lost sight of her.

Precipitous and almost inaccessible rocks, of every variety of form and hue; some springing perpendicularly up like the spire of a church, others running along in broken ridges, or presenting the appearance of high embattled walls; here riven into deep gullies, there opening into wild savage glens, fit spots for robber ambuscade; now presenting a fair smooth surface, now jagged, shattered, shelving, roughened with brushwood; sometimes bleached and hoary as in the case of the pinnacled crag, called the White Kirk; sometimes green with moss or gray with lichen; sometimes, though but rarely, shaded with timber, as in the approach to the cavern named the Earl's Bower; but generally bold and naked, and sombre in tint as the colours employed by the savage Rosa. Such were the distinguishing features of the Gorge of Cliviger when Nicholas traversed it. Now the high embankments and mighty arches of a railway fill up its recesses, and span its gullies; the roar of the engine is heard where the cry of the bird of prey alone resounded; and clouds of steam usurp the place of the mist-wreaths on its crags.

Formerly, the high cliffs abounded with hawks; the rocks echoed with their yells and screeches, and the spots adjoining their nests resembled in the words of the historian of the district, Whitaker, "little charnel houses for the bones of game." Formerly, also, on some inaccessible point built the rock-eagle, and reared its brood from year to year. The gaunt wolf had once ravaged the glens, and the sly fox and fierce cat-a-mountain still harboured within them. Nor were those the only objects of dread. The superstitious declared the gorge was haunted by a frightful, hirsute demon, y'clept Hobthurst.

The general savage character of the ravine was relieved by some spots of exquisite beauty, where the traveller might have lingered with delight, if apprehension of assault from robber, or visit from Hobthurst, had not urged him on. Numberless waterfalls, gushing from fissures in the hills, coursed down their seamy sides, looking like threads of silver as they sprang from point to point. One of the most beautiful of these cascades, issuing from a gully in the rocks near the cavern called the Earl's Bower, fell, in rainy seasons, in one unbroken sheet of a hundred and fifty feet. Through the midst of the gorge ran a swift and brawling stream, known by the appellation of the Calder; but it must not be confounded with the river flowing past Whalley Abbey. The course of this impetuous current was not always restrained within its rocky channel, and when swollen by heavy rains, it would frequently invade the narrow causeway running beside it, and spreading over the whole width of the gorge, render the road almost impassable.

Through this rocky and sombre defile, and by the side of the brawling Calder, which dashed swiftly past him, Nicholas took his way. The hawks were yelling overhead; the rooks were cawing on the topmost branches of some tall timber, on which they built; a raven was croaking rustily in the wood; and a pair of eagles were soaring in the still glowing sky.

By-and-by, the glen contracted, and a wall of steep rocks on either side hemmed the shuddering traveller in. Instinctively, he struck spurs into his horse, and accelerated his pace.

The narrow glen expands, the precipices fall further back, and the traveller breathes more freely. Still, he does not relax his speed, for his imagination has been at work in the gloom, peopling his path with lurking robbers, or grinning boggarts. He begins to fear he shall lose his gold, and execrates his folly

for incurring such heedless risk. But it is too late now to turn back.

It grows rapidly dusk, and objects became less and less distinct, assuming fantastical and fearful forms. A blasted tree, clinging to a rock, and thrusting a bare branch across the road, looks to the squire like a bandit; and a white owl bursting from a bush scares him as if it had been Hobthurst himself. However, in spite of these and other alarms, for which he is indebted to excited fancy, he hurries on, and is proceeding at a thundering pace, when all at once his horse comes to a stop, arrested by a tall female figure, resembling that seen near the mountain cairn at the entrance of the gorge.

Nicholas's blood ran cold, for though in this case he could not apprehend plunder, he was fearful of personal injury, for he believed the woman to be a witch. Mustering up courage, however, he forced Robin to proceed.

If his progress was meant to be barred, a better spot for the purpose could not have been selected. A narrow road, scarcely two feet in width, ran round the ledge of a tremendous crag jutting so far into the glen that it almost met the steep barrier of rocks opposite it. Between these precipitous crags dashed the river in a foaming cascade, nearly twelve feet in height, and the steep narrow causeway winding beside it as above described was rendered excessively slippery and dangerous from the constant cloud of spray arising from the fall.

At the highest and narrowest point of the ledge, and occupying nearly the whole of its space, with an overhanging rock on one side of her and a roaring torrent on the other, stood the tall woman, determined, apparently, from her attitude and deportment, to oppose the squire's further progress. As Nicholas advanced, he became convinced it was the same person he had seen near the cairn, but when her features grew

distinguishable, he found to his surprise, that it was Nance Redferne.

"Halloa! Nance," he cried. "What are you doing here lass, eh?"

"Cum to warn ye, squoire," she replied; "yo once did me a sarvice, an ey hanna forgetten it. That's why I watched ye fro' the cairn cliffs, an motioned ye to ge back. Boh ye didna onderstand my signs, or wouldna heed 'em, so ey be cum'd here to stay ye. Yo're i' dawnger, ey tell ye."

"In danger of what, my good woman?" demanded the squire, uneasily.

"O' bein' robbed, and plundered o' your gowd," replied Nance; "there are five men waitin' to set upon ye a mile further on, at the Bowder Stoans."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nicholas; "they will get little for their pains. I have no money about me."

"Dunna think to deceive me, squoire," rejoined Nance; "ey knoa yo ha borrowed three hundert punds i' gowd fro' yung Ruchot Assheton; an os surely os ye ha it aw under your jerkin, so surely win yo lose it, if yo dunna turn back, or ge on without me keepin' ye company."

"I have no objection on earth to your company, Nance," replied the squire; "quite the contrary. But how the devil should these rascals expect me! And, above all, how should they conjecture I should come so well provided! For, sooth to say, such is not ordinarily the case with me."

"Ey knoa it weel, squoire," replied Nance, with a laugh; "boh they ha received sartin information o'your movements."

"There is only one person who could give them such information," cried Nicholas; "but I cannot, will not suspect him."

"If yo're thinkin' o'Lawrence Fogg, yo 're na far wide o' th' mark, squoire," replied Nance.

"What! Fogg leagued with robbers — impossible!" exclaimed Nicholas.

"Neaw, it's nah so unpossible os aw that," returned Nance; "yo 'n stare when ey tell yo he has robbed yo mony a time without your being aware on it. Yo were onwise enough to send him round to your friends to borrow money for yo."

"True, so I was. But, luckily, no one would lend me any," said Nicholas.

"There yo 're wrong, squoire, fo' unluckily, they aw did," replied Nance, with a scarcely-suppressed laugh. "Roger Nowell gied him one hundred; Tummus Whitaker, of Holme, another; Ruchot Parker, o' Browsholme, another. An more i' th' same way."

"And the rascal pocketed it all, and never brought me back one farthing," cried Nicholas, in a transport of rage. "I'll have him hanged—pshaw! hanging 's too good for him. To deceive me, his friend, his benefactor, his patron, in such a manner. To dwell in my house, eat at my table, drink my wine, wear my habiliments, ride my horses, hunt with my hounds. Has the dog no conscience?"

"Varry little, ey 'm afear'd," replied Nance.

"And the worst of it is," continued the squire, new lights breaking upon him, "I shall be liable for all the sums he has received. He was my confidential agent, and the lenders will come upon me. It must be six or seven hundred pounds that he has obtained in this nefarious way. Zounds! I shall go mad."

"Yo wur to blame fo' trustin him, squoire," rejoined Nance. "Yo ought to ha' made proper inquiries about him at first, an then yo'd ha' found out what sort o' chap he wur. Boh now ey'n tell ye. Lawrence Fogg is chief o' a band o' robbers, an aw the black an villanous deeds done of late i' this place ha' been parpetrated by his men. A poor gentleman wur

murdert by 'em i' this varry spot th' week efore last, an his body cast into t' river. Fogg, of course, had no hont in the fow deed, boh he would na ha interfered to prevent it if he had bin here, fo' he never scrupled shedding blood. An if he had bin content wi' robbin' yo, squoire, ey wadna ha betrayed him, boh when he proposed to cut your throttle, bekose, os he said, dead men tell neaw teles, ey could howd out nah longer, an resolved to gi' yo warnin."

"What a monstrous and unheard-of villain!" cried the squire. "But is he one of the ambuscade?"

Nance replied in the affirmative.

"Then, by heaven! I will confront him — I will hew him down," pursued Nicholas, griping the hilt of his sword.

"Neaw use ey tell ye — yo'n be overpowert an kilt," said Nance. "Tak me wi' yo, an ey'n carry yo safely through em aw; boh ge alone, or yo'n ne'er see Downham again. An now it 's reet ey should tell ye who Lawrence Fogg really is."

"What new wonder is in store for me?" cried Nicholas. "Who is he?"

"Maybe yo ha heerd tell that Mother Demdike had a son and a dowter," replied Nance; "the dowter bein', of course, Elizabeth Device; and the son, Christopher Demdike, being supposed to be dead. Howsomever, this is not the case, for Lawrence Fogg is he."

"I guessed as much when you began," cried Nicholas. "He has a cursedly bad look about the eyes — a damned Demdike physiognomy. What an infernal villain the fellow must be! — without a jot of natural feeling. Why he has this very day assisted at his nephew's capture, and caused his own sister to be arrested. Oh I have been properly duped! To lodge a son of that infernal hag in my house — feed him, clothe him, make him my friend — take him, the viper! to my bosom! I have been rightly served. But he shall hang! — he shall hang.

That is some consolation, though slight. But how do you know all this, Nance?"

"Dunna ax me," she replied. "Whatever ey ha' been to Christopher Demdike, ey bear him neaw love now; fo', os ey ha towd yo, he is a black-hearted murtherin' villain. Boh lemme get up behind yo, an ey'n bring yo through scatheless. An to-morrow yo may arrest the whole band at Malkin Tower."

"Malkin Tower!" exclaimed the squire, in fresh surprise. "What have these robbers taken up their quarters there! This accounts for all the strange sights said to have been seen there of late, and which I treated as mere fables. But, ah! a terrible thought crosses me. What have I done? Mistress Nutter will be there to-night! And I have sent her. Death and destruction! she will fall into their hands. I must go there at once. I cannot take any assistance with me. That would be to betray the poor lady."

"If yo'n trust me ey'n help yo through the difficulty," replied Nance.

"Get up then quickly, lass, since it must be so," rejoined Nicholas.

With this, he moved forward, and giving her his hand she was instantly seated behind him upon Robin, who seemed no way incommoded by his double burthen, but dashed down the further side of the causeway in answer to a sharp application of the spur. Passing her arms round the squire's waist, Nance maintained her seat well, and in this way they rattled along, heedless of the increasing difficulties of the road, or the fast-gathering gloom.

The mile was quickly passed, and Nance whispered in the squire's ear that they were approaching the Boulder Stones. Presently they came to a narrow glen, half-filled with huge rocky fragments, detached from the toppling precipices on

either side, and forming an admirable place of ambuscade. One rock, larger than the rest, completely commanded the pass, and as the squire advanced a thundering voice from it called to him to stay; and the injunction being disregarded, the barrel of a gun was protruded from the bushes covering its brow, and a shot fired at him. Though well aimed, the ball struck the ground beneath his horse's feet, and Nicholas continued his way unmoved, while the faulty marksman jumped down the crag. At the same time four other men started from their places of concealment behind the stones, and, levelling their calivers at the fugitives, fired. The sharp discharges echoed along the gorge, and the shots rattled against the rocks, but none of them took effect, and Nicholas might have gone on without further hindrance, but, despite Nance's remonstrances, who urged him to go on, he pulled up to await the coming of the person who had first challenged him. Scarcely an instant elapsed before he was beside the squire, and presented a petronel at his head. Notwithstanding the gloom Nicholas recognised him.

"Ah! it is thou, accursed traitor," cried Nicholas.

"I could scarcely believe in thy villany, but now I am convinced."

"The jade you have got behind you has told you who I am, I see," replied Fogg. "I will settle with her anon. But this will save further explanations with you!"

And he discharged the petronel full at the squire. But the ball rebounded as if his doublet had been quilted. It was in fact lined with gold. On seeing the squire unhurt, the robber captain uttered an exclamation of rage and astonishment.

"You are mistaken, you see, perfidious villain," cried Nicholas. "You have yet to render an account of all the wrongs you have done me, but meantime you shall not pass unpunished."

And as he spoke, he snatched the petronel from Fogg, and with the butt-end dealt him a tremendous blow on the head. felling him to the ground.

By this time, the other robbers had descended from the rocks, and seeing the fall of their leader, rushed forward to avenge him, but Nicholas did not tarry for any further encounter; but, fully satisfied with what he had done, struck spurs into Robin, and galloped off. For a few minutes he could hear the shouts of the men, but they soon afterwards died away.

Little more than half the ravine had been traversed when the rencounter above-described took place, but though the road was still difficult and dangerous, and rendered doubly so by the obscurity, no further hindrance occurred till just as Nicholas was quitting the gloomy intricacies of the gorge and approaching the more open country beyond it. At this point Robin fell, throwing both him and Nance, and when the animal rose again he was found to be so much injured that it was impossible to mount him. There was no resource but to proceed to Burnley, which was still three or four miles distant, on foot.

In this dilemma, Nance volunteered to provide the squire with another steed, but he resolutely refused the offer.

"No, no - none of your broomsticks for me," he cried; "no devil's horses — I don't know where they may carry me. My own legs must serve me now. I'll just take poor Robin out of the road, and then trudge off for Burnley as fast as I can."

With this, he led the horse to a small green mead skirting the stream, and taking off his saddle and bridle, and depositing them carefully under a tree, he patted the animal on the neck, promising to return for him on the morrow, and then set off at a brisk pace, with Nance walking beside him. They had not gone far, however, when the clattering of hoofs was

heard behind them, and it was evident that several horsemen were rapidly approaching. Nance stopped, listened for a moment, and then declaring it was Demdike and his band in pursuit, seized the squire's arm and drew him out of the road, and under the shelter of some bushes of hazel. The robber captain could only have been stunned, it appeared, and as soon as he had recovered from the effects of the blow, had mounted his horse, which was concealed, with those of his men, behind the rocks, and started after the fugitives. Such was the construction put upon the matter by Nance, and the event proved it correct. A loud shout from the horsemen, and a sudden halt, proclaimed that poor Robin had been discovered, and this circumstance seemed to give great satisfaction to Demdike who loudly declared that they were now sure of overtaking the runaways.

"They cannot be far off," he cried; "but they will most likely attempt to hide themselves, so look well about you."

So saying, he rode on, and it was evident from the noise, that the men implicitly obeyed his injunctions. Nothing, however, was found, and ere many minutes, Demdike came up, and glancing at the hazels, behind which the fugitives were hidden, he discharged a petronel into the largest tree, but as no movement followed the report, he said,

"I thought I saw something move here, but I suppose I was mistaken. No doubt they have got on further than we expected, or have retired into some of the cloughs, in which case it will be useless to search for them. However, we will make sure of them in this way. Two of you shall form an ambuscade near Holme, and two further on within half a mile of Burnley, and shall remain on the watch till dawn, so that you will be sure to capture them, and, when taken, make away with them without hesitation. Unless my skull had been of the strongest, that butcherly squire would have cracked it, so he

shall have no grace from me; and as to that treacherous witch, Nance Redferne, she deserves death at our hands, and she shall have her deserts. I have long suspected her, and, indeed, was a fool to trust one of the vile Chattox brood, who are all my natural enemies — but no matter, I shall have my revenge."

The men having promised compliance with their captain's command, he went on —

"As to myself," he said, "I shall go forthwith, and as fast as my horse can carry me, to Malkin Tower, and I will tell you why. It is not that I dislike the game we are upon, but I have better to play just now. Tom Shaw, the cock-master at Downham, who is in my pay, rode over to Whalley this afternoon, to bring me word that a certain lady, who has long been concealed in the Manor-house, will be taken to Malkin Tower to-night. The intelligence is certain, for he obtained it from Old Crouch, the huntsman, who is to escort her. Thus, Mistress Nutter, for you all know whom I mean, will fall naturally into our hands, and we can wring any sums of money we like out of her, for though she has abandoned her property to her daughter, Alizon, she can no doubt have as much as she wants, and I will take care she asks for plenty, or I will try the effect of some of those instruments of torture which I was lucky enough to find in the dungeons of Malkin Tower, and which were used for a like purpose by my predecessor, Blackburn, the freebooter. Are you content, my lads?"

"Ay, ay, Captain Demdike," they replied.

Upon this, the whole party set forward, and were speedily out of hearing. As soon as they thought it prudent to come forth, the squire and Nance emerged from their place of shelter.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed the former, who was

almost in a state of distraction. "The villain has announced his intention of going to Malkin Tower, and Mistress Nutter will assuredly fall into his hands. Oh! that I could stop him, or get there before him!"

"Yo shan, if yo like to ride wi' me," said Nance

"But how — in what way?" asked Nicholas.

"Leave that to me," replied Nance, breaking off a long branch of hazel. "Task howld o' this," she cried.

The squire obeyed, and was instantly carried off his legs, and whisked through the air at a prodigious rate.

He felt giddy and confused, but did not dare to leave go, lest he should be dashed in pieces, while Nance's wild laughter rang in his ears.

Over the bleached and perpendicular crag — startling the eagle from his eyrie — over the yawning gully with the torrent roaring beneath him — over the sharp ridges of the hill — over Townley Park — over Burnley steeple — over the wide valley beyond he went — until, at last, bewildered, out of breath, and like one in a dream, he alighted on a brown, bare, heathy expanse, and within a hundred yards of a tall, circular stone structure, which he knew to be Malkin Tower.

CHAPTER V.

The end of Malkin Tower.

THE shades of night had fallen on Downham manor-house, and with an aching heart, and a strong presentiment of ill, Mistress Nutter prepared to quit the little chamber which had sheltered her for more than two months, and where she would willingly have breathed her latest sigh, if it had been so permitted her. Closing the Bible she had been reading, she placed the sacred volume under her arm, and taking up a small bundle containing her slender preparations for travel, extinguished

the taper, and then descending by a secret staircase, passed through a door, fashioned externally like a cupboard, and entered a summer-house, where she found old Crouch awaiting her.

A few whispered words only passed between her and the huntsman, and informing her that the horses were in waiting at the back of the garden, he took the bundle from her, and would fain have relieved her, also, of the Bible, but she would not part with it, and pressing it more closely to her bosom, said she was quite ready to attend him.

It was a beautiful, starlight night; the air soft and balmy, and laden with the perfume of the flowers. A nightingale was singing plaintively in an adjoining tree, and presently came a response equally tender from another part of the grove. Mistress Nutter could not choose but listen, and the melody so touched her that she was half suffocated by repressed emotion, for, alas! the relief of tears was denied her.

Motioning her somewhat impatiently to come on, Crouch struck into a sombre alley, edged by clipped yew trees, and terminating in a plantation, through which a winding path led to the foot of the hill whereon the mansion was situated. By daylight this was a beautitnl walk, affording exquisite glimpses through the trees of the surrounding scenery, and commanding a noble view of Pendle Hill, the dominant point in the prospect. But even now to the poor lady, so long immured in her cell-like chamber, and deprived of many of nature's choicest blessings, it appeared delightful. The fresh air, redolent of new-mown hay, fanned her pale cheek and feverish brow, and allayed her agitation and excitement. The perfect stillness, broken only by the lowing of the cattle in the adjoining pastures, by the drowsy hum of the dor-fly, or the rippling of the beck in the valley, further calmed her; and the soothing influence was completed by a contemplation of the serene

heavens wherein were seen the starry host, with the thin bright crescent of the new moon in the midst of them, diffusing a pearly light around her. One blot alone appeared in the otherwise smiling sky, and this was a great, ugly, black cloud, lowering over the summit of Pendle Hill.

Mistress Nutter noticed the portentous cloud, and noticed also its shadow on the hill, which might have been cast by the Fiend himself, so like was it to a demoniacal shape with outstretched wings; but, though shuddering at the idea it suggested, she would not suffer it to obtain possession of her mind, but resolutely fixed her attention on other and more pleasing objects.

By this time, they had reached the foot of the hill, and a gate admitted them to a road running by the side of Downham beck. Here they found the horses in charge of a man in the dark red livery of Nicholas Assheton, and who was no other than Tom Shaw, the rascally cock-master. Delivering the bridles to Crouch, the knave hastily strode away, but he lingered at a little distance to see the lady mount; and then, leaping the hedge, struck through the plantation towards the hall, chinking the money in his pockets as he went, and thinking how cleverly he had earned it. But he did not go unpunished, for it is a satisfaction to record that in walking through the woods, he was caught in a gin placed there by Crouch, which held him fast in its iron teeth till morning, when he was discovered by one of the underkeepers while going his rounds, in a deplorable condition, and lamed for life.

Meanwhile, unconscious either of the manner in which she had been betrayed, or of the punishment awaiting her betrayer, Mistress Nutter followed her conductor in silence. For a while, the road continued by the side of the brook, and then quitting it, commenced a long and tedious ascent, run-

ning between high banks fringed with trees. The overhanging boughs rendered it so dark that Mistress Nutter could scarcely distinguish the old huntsman, though he was not many yards in advance of her, but she heard the tramp of his horse, and that was enough.

All at once, where the boughs were thickest, and the road darkest, she perceived a small fiery object on the bank, and in her alarm called out to the huntsman, who, looking back for a moment, laughed, and told her not to be uneasy, for it was only a glow-worm. Ashamed of her idle fears, she rode on, but had not proceeded far, when looking again at the bank, she saw it studded with the same lights. This time she did not call out, or scream, but gazed steadily at the twinkling fires, hoping to get the better of her fears. Her alarm, however, rose to absolute terror, as she beheld the glow-worms — if glow-worms they were — twist together and form themselves into a flaming brand, such as she had seen in her vision, grasped by the angel who had driven her from the gates of Paradise.

Averting her gaze, she would have hastened on, but a hand suddenly laid upon her bridle, held back her horse; and she then perceived a tall dark man, mounted on a sable steed, riding beside her. The supernatural character of the horseman was manifest, inasmuch as no sound was caused by the tread of his steed, nor did he appear to be visible to Crouch when the latter looked back. Mistress Nutter maintained her seat with difficulty. She well knew who was her companion.

"Soh, Alice Nutter," said the horseman, at length, in a low deep tone, "you have chosen to shut yourself up in a narrow cell, like a recluse, for more than two months, denying yourself all sort of enjoyment, practising severest abstinence, and passing your whole time in useless prayer — ay, useless, for if you were to pray from now till doomsday — come when

it will, a thousand years hence, or to-morrow — it will not save you. When you signed that bond to my master, sentence was recorded against you, and no power can recall it. Why, then, these unavailing lamentations? Why utter prayers which are rejected, and supplications which are scorned? Shake off this weakness, Alice, and be yourself again. Once you had pride enough, and a little of it would now be of service to you. You would then see the folly of this abject conduct — humbling yourself to the dust only to be spurned, and suing for mercy only to be derided. Pray as loud and as long as you will, the ears of Heaven will remain ever deaf to you."

"I hope otherwise," rejoined the lady, meekly.

"Do not deceive yourself," replied the horseman. "The term granted you by your compact will not be abridged, but it is your own fault if it be not extended. Your daughter is destroying herself in the vain hope of saving you. Her prayers are unavailing as your own, and recoil from the Judgment Throne unheard. The youth upon whom her affections are fixed is stricken with a deadly ailment. It is in your power to save them both."

Mistress Nutter groaned deeply.

"It is in your power, I say, to save them," continued the horseman, "by returning to your allegiance to your master. He will forgive your disobedience if you prove yourself zealous in his service; will restore you to your former worldly position; avenge you of your enemies; and accomplish all you may desire with respect to your daughter."

"He cannot do it," replied Mistress Nutter.

"Cannot!" echoed the horseman. "Try him! For many years I have served you as familiar; and you have never set me the task I have failed to execute. I am ready to become your servant again, and to offer you a yet larger range of control. Put no limits to your desires or ambition. If you are

tired of this narrow sphere, take a wider. Look abroad. But do not shut yourself up in a narrow cell, and persuade yourself you are accomplishing your ultimate deliverance, when you are only wasting precious time, which might be more advantageously and far more agreeably employed. While laughing at your folly, my master deplores it; and he has, therefore, sent me as to one for whom, notwithstanding all derelictions from duty, he has still a regard, with an offer of full forgiveness, provided you return to him at once, and renew your covenant, proving your sincerity by casting from you the book you hold under your arm."

"Your snares are not laid subtly enough to catch me," replied Mistress Nutter, "I will never part with this holy volume, which is my present safeguard, and on which I build my hopes of salvation — hopes, which your very proposals have revived within my breast, for I am well assured your master would not make them if he felt confident of his power over me. No; I defy him and you, and I command you, in Heaven's name, to get hence, and to tempt me no longer!"

As the words were uttered, with a howl of rage and mortification, like the roar of a wild beast, the dark horseman and his steed vanished. Alarmed by the sound, Crouch stopped, and questioned the lady as to its cause, but receiving no satisfactory explanation from her, he bade her ride quickly on, affirming it must be the boggart of the clough.

Soon after this they again came upon Downham beck, and were about to cross it, when their purpose was arrested by a joyous barking, and the next moment Grip came up. The dog, it appeared, had been shut up in the stable, his company not being desired on the expedition, but, contriving in some way or other to get out, he had scented his master's course, and in the end overtaken him. Crouch did not know whether to be angry or pleased, and at first gave utterance to an oath,

and raised his whip to chastise him, but almost instantly the latter feeling predominated, and he welcomed the faithful animal with a few kind words.

"Ey suppose theaw thowt ey couldna do without thee, Grip," he said, "an mayhap theaw'rt reet."

They are now across the beck, and speeding over the wide brown waste. The huntsman warily shapes his course so as to avoid any limestone-quarries or turf-pits. He points out a jack-o'-lantern dancing merrily on the surface of a dangerous morass, and tells a dismal tale of a traveller lured into it by the delusive light and swallowed up.

Mistress Nutter pays little heed to him, but ever and anon looks back, as if in dread of some one behind her. But no one is visible, and she only sees the great black cloud still hovering over Pendle Hill.

On — on — they go; their horses' hoofs now splashing through the wet sod, now beating upon the firm but elastic turf. A merry ride it would be, if their errand were different, and their hearts free from care. The air is fresh and reviving, and the rapid motion exhilarating. The stars shine out, and the crescent moon is still glittering in the heavens, but the black cloud hangs motionless on Pendle Hill.

Now and then some bird of night flies past them, and they hear the whooping of the owl, and see him skimming like a ghost over the waste. Then more fen fires arise, showing that other treacherous quagmires are at hand; but Crouch skirts them safely. Now the bull-frog croaks in the marsh, and a deep booming tells of a bittern passing by. They see the mighty bird above them with his wide heavy wings and long neck. Grip howls at him, but is instantly checked by his master, and they gallop on.

They are now by the side of Pendle Water, and within sight of Rough Lee. What tumultuous thoughts agitate the

lady's breast! The ground she tramples on was once her own; the woods by the river side were planted by her; the mansion before her once owned her as mistress, and now she dares not approach it. Nor does she desire to do so, for the sight of it brings back terrible recollections, and fills her again with despair.

They are now close upon it, and it appears dark, silent, and deserted. How different from what it was of yore in her husband's days — the husband she had foully slain. Speed on old huntsman! — lash your panting horse, or the remorseful lady will far outstrip you, for she rides as if the avenging furies were at her heels.

She is rattling over the bridge, and Crouch, toiling after her, and with Grip toiling after him, shouts to her to moderate her pace. She looks back and beholds the grim old house frowning full upon her, and hurries on. Huntsman and dog are left behind for awhile, but the steep ascent soon compels her to slacken speed, and they come up, Crouch swearing lustily, and Grip, with his tongue out of his mouth, limping as if foot sore.

The road now leads through a thicket. The horses stumble frequently, for the stones are loose, and the footing consequently uncertain. Crouch has a fall, and ere he can remount, the lady is gone. It is useless to hurry after her, and he is proceeding slowly, when Grip, who is a little in advance, growls fiercely, and looks back at his master, as if to intimate that danger is at hand. The huntsman presses on, but he is too late, if, indeed, he could at any time have rendered effectual assistance. A clearing in the thicket shows him the lady dismounted, and surrounded by several wild-looking men armed with calivers. Part of the band bear her shrieking off, and the rest fire at him, but without effect, and then chase him as far as the steepest part of the hill, down which he

dashes, followed by Grip. Arrived at the bottom, he pauses to listen if he is pursued, and hearing nothing further to alarm him, debates with himself what is best to be done; and, not liking to alarm the village, for that would be to betray Mistress Nutter, he gets off his horse, ties him to a tree, and with Grip close at his heels, commences the ascent of the hill by a different road from that he had previously taken.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter's captors dragged her forcibly towards the tower. Their arms and appearance left her no doubt they were depredators, and she sought to convince them she had neither money nor valuables in her possession. They laughed at her assertions, but made no other reply. Her sole consolation was that they did not seek to deprive her of her Bible.

On reaching the tower, a signal was given by one of the foremost of the band, and the steps being lowered from the high doorway, she was compelled to ascend them, and being pushed along a short passage, obscured by a piece of thick tapestry, but which was drawn aside as she advanced, she found herself in a circular chamber, in the midst of which was a massive table covered with flasks and drinking-cups, and stained with wine. From the roof, which was crossed by great black beams of oak, was suspended a lamp with three burners, whose light showed that the walls were garnished with petronels, rapiers, poniards, and other murderous weapons; besides these there were hung from pegs long riding cloaks, sombreros, vizards, and other robber accoutrements, including a variety of disguises, from the clown's frieze jerkin to the gentleman's velvet doublet, ready to be assumed on an emergency. Here and there was an open valise, or a pair of saddle-bags with their contents strewn about the floor, and on a bench were a dice-box and shuffle-board, showing with the

flasks and goblets on the table, how the occupants of the tower passed their time.

A steep ladder-like flight of steps led to the upper chamber, and down these, at the very moment of Mistress Nutter's entrance, descended a stalwart personage, who eyed her fiercely as he leapt upon the floor. There was something in the man's truculent physiognomy, and strange and oblique vision, that reminded her of Mother Demdike.

"Welcome to Malkin Tower, Madam," said the robber with a grin, and doffing his cap, with affected courtesy. "We have met before, but it is many years ago, and I dare say you have forgotten me. You will guess who I am when I tell you my mother occupied this tower before me."

Finding Mistress Nutter make no remark, he went on,

"I am Christopher Demdike, Madam — Captain Demdike, I should say. The brave fellows who have brought you hither are part of my band, and till lately Northumberland and the borders of Scotland used to be our scene of action, but chancing to hear of my worthy old mother's death, I thought we could not do better than take possession of her stronghold, which devolved upon me by right of inheritance. Since our arrival here we have kept ourselves very quiet, and the country folk taking us for spirits or demons, never approach our hiding-place; while, as all our depredations are confined to distant parts, our retreat has never been suspected."

"This concerns me little," observed Mistress Nutter, coldly.

"Pardon me, Madam, it concerns you much, as you will learn anon. But be seated, I pray you," he said, with mock civility, "I am keeping you standing all this while."

But as the lady declined the attention, he went on,

"I was fortunate enough, on first coming back to this part of the country, to pick up an acquaintance with your relative,

Nicholas Assheton, who invited me to stay with him at Downham, and was so well pleased with my society that he could not endure to part with me."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter, "are you the person he called Lawrence Fogg?"

"The same," replied Demdike; "and no doubt you would hear a good report of me, Madam. Well, it suited my purpose to stay; for I was very hospitably entertained by the squire, who, except being rather too much addicted to lectures and psalm-singing, is as pleasant a host as one could desire; besides which, he was obliging enough to employ me to borrow money for him, and what I got I kept, you may be sure."

"I would willingly be spared the details of your knavery," said Mistrcss Nutter, somewhat impatiently.

"I am coming to an end," rejoined Demdike, "and then, perhaps, you may wish I had prolonged them. All the squire's secrets were committed to me, and I was fully aware of your concealment in the hall, but I could never ascertain precisely where you were lodged. I meant to carry you off, and only awaited the opportunity which has presented itself to-night."

"If you think to obtain money from me, you will find yourself mistaken," said Mistress Nutter. "I have parted with all my possessions."

"But to whom, Madam," cried Demdike, with a sinister smile — "to your daughter. And I am sure she is too gentle, too tender-hearted, to allow you to suffer when she can relieve you. You must get us a good round sum from her, or you will be detained here long. The dungeons are dark and unwholesome, and my band are apt to be harsh in their treatment of captives. They have found in the vaults some instruments of torture belonging to old Blackburn, the freebooter, the efficacy of which in an obstinate case I fear they might be inclined

to try. You now begin to see the drift of my discourse, Madam, and understand the sort of men you have to deal with — barbarous fellows, Madam — inhuman dogs!"

And he laughed coarsely at his own jocularity.

"It may put an end to this discussion," said Mistress Nutter, firmly, "if I declare that no torture shall induce me to make any such demand from my daughter."

"You think, perhaps, I am jesting with you, Madam," rejoined Demdike.

"Oh! no, I believe you capable of any atrocity," replied the lady. "You do not, either in feature or deeds, belie your parentage."

"Ah! say you so, Madam?" cried Demdike. "You have a sharp tongue, I find. Courtesy is thrown away upon you. What, ho! lads — Kenyon and Lowton, take the lady down to the vaults, and there let her have an hour for solitary reflection. She may change her mind in that time."

"Do not think it," cried Mistress Nutter, resolutely.

"If you continue obstinate, we will find means to move you," rejoined Demdike, in a taunting tone. "But what has she got beneath her arm? Give me the book. What 's this? — a Bible! A witch with a Bible! It should be a grimoire. Ha! ha!"

"Give it me back, I implore of you," shrieked the lady. "I shall be destroyed, soul and body, if I have it not with me."

"What! you are afraid the devil may carry you off without it — ho! ho!" roared Demdike. "Well, that would not suit my purpose at present. Here take it — and now off with her, lads, without more ado!"

And as he spoke, a trap-door was opened by one of the robbers, disclosing a flight of steps leading to the subterranean chambers, down which the miserable lady was dragged.

Presently, the two men re-appeared with a grim smile on their ruffianly countenances, and, as they closed the trap-door, one of them observed to the captain that they had chained her to a pillar, by removing the band from the great skeleton, and passing it round her body.

"You have done well, lads," replied Demdike, approvingly, "and now go all of you and scour the hill top, and return in an hour, and we will decide upon what is to be done with this womau."

The two men then joined the rest of their comrades outside, and the whole troop descended the steps, which were afterwards drawn up by Demdike. This done, the robber captain returned to the circular chamber, and for some time paced to and fro, revolving his dark schemes. He then paused, and placing his ear near the trap-door, listened, but as no sound reached him, he sat down at the table, and soon grew so much absorbed as to be unconscious that a dark figure was creeping stealthily down the narrow staircase behind him.

"I cannot get rid of Nicholas Assheton," he exclaimed at length. "I somehow fancy we shall meet again; and yet all should be over with him by this time."

"Look round!" thundered a voice behind him. "Nicholas Assheton is not to be got rid of so easily."

At this unexpected summons, Demdike started to his feet, and recoiled aghast, as he saw what he took to be the ghost of the murdered squire standing before him. A second look, however, convinced him that it was no phantom he beheld, but a living man, armed for vengeance, and determined upon it.

"Get a weapon, villain," cried Nicholas, in tones of concentrated fury. "I do not wish to take unfair advantage, even of thee."

Without a word of reply, Demdike snatched a sword from

the wall, and the next moment was engaged in deadly strife with the squire. They were well matched, for both were powerful men, both expert in the use of their weapons, and the combat might have been protracted and of doubtful issue but for the irresistible fury of Nicholas, who assaulted his adversary with such vigour and determination that he speedily drove him against the wall, where the latter made an attempt to seize a petronel hanging beside him, but his purpose being divined, he received a thrust through the arm, and, dropping his blade, lay at the squire's mercy.

Nicholas shortened his sword, but forbore to strike. Seizing his enemy by the throat he hurled him to the ground, and planting his knee on his chest, called out, "What, ho, Nance!"

"Nance!" exclaimed Demdike, — "then it was that mischievous jade who brought you here."

"Ay," replied the squire, as the young woman came quickly down the steps, — "and I refused her aid in the conflict because I felt certain of mastering thee, and because I would not take odds even against such a treacherous villain as thou art."

"Better dispatch him, squire," said Nance; "he may do yo a mischief yet."

"No — no," replied Nicholas, "he is unworthy of a gentleman 's sword. Besides, I have sworn to hang him, and I will keep my word. Go down into the vaults and liberate Mistress Nutter, while I bind him, for we must take him with us. To-morrow, he shall lie in Lancaster Castle with his kinsfolk."

"That remains to be seen," muttered Demdike.

"Be on your guard, squire," cried Nance, as she lifted a small lamp, and raised the trap-door.

With this caution, she descended to the vaults, while Nicholas looked about for a thong, and perceiving a rope dan-

gling down the wall near him, he seized it, drawing it with some force towards him.

A sudden sound reached his ears — clang! clang! He had rung the alarm-bell violently.

Clang! clang! clang! Would it never stop?

Taking advantage of his surprise and consternation, Demdike got from under him, sprang to his feet, and rushing to the doorway, instantly let fall the steps, roaring out, —

"Treason! to the rescue, my men! to the rescue!"

His cries were immediately answered from without, and it was evident from the tumult that the whole of the band were hurryiug to his assistance.

Not a moment was to be lost by the squire. Plunging through the trap-door, he closed it after him, and bolted it underneath at the very moment the robbers entered the chamber. Demdike's rage at finding him gone, was increased, when all the combined efforts of his men failed in forcing open the trap-door.

"Take hatchets, and hew it open," he cried, "we must have them. I have heard there is a secret outlet below, and though I have never been able to discover it, it may be known to Nance. I will go outside, and watch. If you hear me whistle, come forth instantly."

And, rushing forth, he was making the circuit of the tower, and examining some bushes at its base, when his throat was suddenly seized by a dog, and before he could even utter an exclamation, much less sound his whistle, or use his arms, he was grappled by the old huntsman, and dragged off to a considerable distance, the dog still clinging to his throat.

Meanwhile, Nicholas had hurried down into the vaults, where he found Nance sustaining Mistress Nutter, who was half fainting, and hastily explaining what had occurred, she

consigned the lady to him, and then led the way through the central range of pillars, and past the ebon image, until she approached the wall, when, holding up the lamp, she revealed a black marble slab between the statues of Blackburn and Isole. Pressing against it, the slab moved on one side, and disclosed a flight of steps.

"Go up there," cried Nance, to the squire, "and when ye get to th' top, yo'n find another stoan, wi' a nob in it. Yo canna miss it. Go on."

"But you!" cried the squire. "Will you not come with us?"

"Ey'n come presently," replied Nance, with a strange smile. "Ey ha summat to do first. That cunning fox Demdike has set a trap fo' himsel an aw his followers, — and it 's fo' me to ketch 'em. Wait fo' me about a hundert yorts fro' th' tower. Nah nearer — yo onderstand."

Nicholas did not very clearly understand, but concluding Nance had some hidden meaning in what she said, he resolved unhesitatingly to obey her. Having got clear of the tower, as directed, with Mistress Nutter, he ran on with her to some distance, when what was his surprise to find Crouch and Grip keeping watch over the prostrate robber chief. A few words from the huntsman sufficed to explain how this had come about, but they were scarcely uttered when Nance rushed up in breathless haste, crying out — "Off! further off! as yo value your lives!"

Seeing from her manner that delay would be dangerous, Nicholas and Crouch laid hold of the prisoner and bore him away between them, while Nance assisted Mistress Nutter along.

They had not gone far when a rumbling sound like that preceding an earthquake was heard.

All looked back towards Malkin Tower. The structure

was seen to rock — flames burst from the earth — and with a tremendous explosion heard for miles around, and which shook the ground even where Nicholas and the others stood, the whole of the unhallowed fabric, from base to summit, was blown into the air, some of the stones being projected to an extraordinary distance.

A mine charged with gunpowder, it appeared, had been laid beneath its vaults by Demdike, with a view to its destruction at some future period, and this circumstance being known to Nance, she had fired the train.

Not one of the robbers within the tower escaped. The bodies of all were found next day, crushed, burned, or frightfully mutilated.

CHAPTER VI.

Hoghton Tower.

About a month after the occurrence last described, and early on a fine morning in August, Nicholas Assheton and Richard Sherborne rode forth together from the proud town of Preston. Both were gaily attired in doublets and hose of yellow velvet, slashed with white silk, with mantles to match, the latter being somewhat conspicuously embroidered on the shoulder with a wild bull, worked in gold, and underneath it the motto "*Malgré le Tort.*" Followed at a respectful distance by four mounted attendants, the two gentlemen had crossed the bridge over the Ribble, and were wending their way along the banks of a tributary stream, the Darwen, within a short distance of the charming village of Walton-le-Dale, when they perceived a horseman advancing slowly towards them, whom they instantly hailed as Richard Assheton, and pushing forward, were soon beside him. Both were much shocked by the young man's haggard looks, and inquired anxiously as to

his health, but Richard bade them, with a melancholy smile, not be uneasy, for all would be well with him ere long.

"All will be over with you, lad, if you don't mind; and that 's, perhaps, what you mean," replied Nicholas; "but as soon as the royal festivities at Hoghton are over I 'll set about your cure; and what 's more, I 'll accomplish it, for I know where the seat of the disease lies better than Doctor Morphew, your family physician at Middleton. 'T is near the heart, Dick — near the heart. Ha! — I see I have touched you, lad. But, beshrew me, you are very strangely attired, in a suit of sable velvet, with a black Spanish hat and feather, for a festival! You look as if going to a funeral. I am fearful his Majesty may take it amiss. Why not wear the livery of our house?"

"Nay, if it comes to that," rejoined Richard, "why do not you and Sherborne wear it, instead of flaunting like daws in borrowed plumage? I scarce know you in your strange garb, and certainly should not take you for an Assheton, or aught pertaining to our family, from your gaudy colours and the strange badge on your shoulder."

"I don't wonder at it, Dick," said Nicholas; "I scarce know myself, and though the clothes I wear are well made enough, they seem to sit awkwardly on me, and trouble me as much as the shirt of Nessus did Hercules of old. For the nonce I am Sir Richard Hoghton's retainer. I must own I was angry with myself when I saw Sir Ralph Assheton with his long train of gentlemen, all in murrey-coloured cloaks and doublets, at Myerscough Lodge, while I, his cousin, was habited like one of another house. And when I would have excused my apparent defection to Sir Ralph, he answered coldly, 'It was better as it was, for he could scarce have found room for me among his friends.'"

"Do not fret yourself, Nicholas," rejoined Sherborne;

"Sir Ralph cannot reasonably take offence at a mere piece of good nature on your part. But this does not explain why Richard affects a colour so sombre."

"I am the retainer of one whose livery is sombre," replied the young man, with a ghastly smile. "But enough of this," he added, endeavouring to assume a livelier air; "I suppose you are on the way to Hoghton Tower. I thought to reach Preston before you were up, but I might have recollected you are no lag-a-bed, Nicholas, not even after hard drinking overnight, as witness your feats at Whalley. To be frank with you, I feared being led into like excesses, and so preferred passing the night at the quiet little inn at Walton-le-Dale to coming on to you at the Castle at Preston, which I knew would be full of noisy roysterers."

"Full it was, even to overflowing," replied the squire, "but you should have come, Dick, for, by my troth! we had a right merry night of it. Stephen Hamerton, of Hellyfield Peel, with his wife, and her sister, sweet Mistress Doll Lister, supped with us; and we had music, dancing, and singing, and abundance of good cheer. Nouns! Dick, Doll Lister is a delightful lass, and if you can only get Alizon out of your head, would be just the wife for you. She sings like an angel, has the most captivating sigh-and-die-away manner, and the prettiest rounded figure ever bodice kept in. Were I in your place I should know where to choose. But you will see her at Hoghton to-day, for she is to be at the banquet and masque."

"Your description does not tempt me," said Richard; "I have no taste for sigh-and-die-away damsels. Dorothy Lister, however, is accounted fair enough, but were she fascinating as Venus herself, in my present mood I should not regard her."

"I' faith, lad, I pity you, if such be the case," shrugging his shoulders, more in contempt than compassion.

"Waste not your sympathy upon me," replied Richard; "but, tell me, how went the show at Preston yesterday?"

"Excellently well, and much to his Majesty's satisfaction," answered the squire. "Proud Preston never was so proud before, and never with such good reason, for if the people be poor, according to the proverb, they took good care to hide their poverty. Bombards were fired from the bridge, and the church bells rang loud enough to crack the steeple, and bring it down about the ears of the deafened lieges. The houses were hung with carpets and arras; the streets strewn ankle deep with sand and sawdust; the cross in the market-place was bedecked with garlands of flowers like a May-pole; and the conduit near it ran wine. At noon there was more firing, and, amidst flourishes of trumpets, rolling of drums, squeaking of fifes, and prodigious shouting, bonnie King Jamie came to the cross, where a speech was made him by Master Breares, the Recorder; after which the corporation presented his Majesty with a huge silver bowl, in token of their love and loyalty. The King seemed highly pleased with the gift, and observed to the Duke of Buckingham, loud enough to be heard by the bystanders, who reported his speech to me, 'God's santie! it 's a braw bicker, Steenie, and might serve for a christening-cup, if we had need of siccan a vessel, which, Heaven be praised, we ha'e na!' After this there was a grand banquet in the town-hall; and when the heat of the day was over the King left with his train for Hoghton Tower, visiting the alum mines on the way thither. We are bidden to breakfast by Sir Richard, so we must push on, Dick, for his Majesty is an early riser, like myself. We are to have rare sport today. Hunting in the morning, a banquet, and, as I have already intimated, a masque at night, in which Sir George

Goring and Sir John Finett will play, and in which I have been solicited to take the drolling part of Jem Tospot — nay, laugh not, Dick, Sherborne says I shall play it to the life — as well as to find some mirthful dame to enact the companion part of Doll Wango. I have spoken with two or three on the subject, and fancy one of them will oblige me. There is another matter on which I am engaged. I am to present a petition to his Majesty from a great number of the lower orders in this county, praying they may be allowed to take their diversions, as of old accustomed, after divine service on Sundays; and though I am the last man to desire any violation of the Sabbath, being somewhat puritanically inclined, as they now phrase it, yet I cannot think any harm can ensue from lawful recreation and honest exercise. Still, I would any one were chosen to present the petition rather than myself."

"Have no misgivings on the subject," said Richard, "but urge the matter strongly; and if you need support, I will give you all I can, for I feel we are best observing the divine mandate by making the Sabbath a day of rest, and observing it cheerfully. And this, I apprehend, is the substance of your petition?"

"The whole sum and substance," replied Nicholas; "and I have reason to believe his Majesty's wishes are in accordance with it."

"They are known to be so," said Sherborne.

"I am glad to hear it," cried Richard. "God save King James, the friend of the people!"

"Ay, God save King James!" echoed Nicholas; "and if he grant this petition he will prove himself their friend, for he will have all the clergy against him, and will be preached against from half the pulpits in the kingdom."

"Little harm will ensue if it should be so," replied Richard;

"for he will be cheered and protected by the prayers of a grateful and happy people."

They then rode on for a few minutes in silence, after which Richard inquired —

"You had brave doings at Myerscough Lodge, I suppose, Nicholas?"

"Ay, marry had we," answered the squire, "and the feasting must have cost Ned Tyldesley a pretty penny. Besides the King and his own particular attendants, there were some dozen noblemen and their followers, including the Duke of Buckingham, who moves about like a king himself, and I know not how many knights and gentlemen. Sherborne and I rode over from Dunnow, and reached the forest immediately after the King had entered it in his coach, so we took a short cut through the woods, and came up just in time to join Sir Richard Hoghton's train as he was riding up to his Majesty. Fancy a wide glade, down which a great gilded coach is slowly moving, drawn by eight horses, and followed by a host of noblemen and gentlemen, in splendid apparel, their esquires and pages equally richly arrayed, and equally well mounted; and, after these, numerous falconers, huntsmen, prickers, foresters, and yeomen, with staghounds in leash, and hawk on fist, all ready for the sport. Fancy all this, if you can, Dick, and then conceive what a brave sight it must have been. Well, as I said, we came up in the very nick of time, for presently the royal coach stopped, and Sir Richard Hoghton, calling all his gentlemen around him, and bidding us dismount, and we followed him, and drew up, bareheaded, before the King, while Sir Richard pointed out to his Majesty the boundaries of the royal forest, and told him he would find it as well stocked with deer as any in his kingdom. Before putting an end to the conference, the King complimented the worthy Knight on the gallant appearance of his train, and on learning

we were all gentlemen, graciously signified his pleasure that some of us should be presented to him. Amongst others, I was brought forward by Sir Richard, and liking my looks, I suppose, the King was condescending enough to enter into conversation with me, and as his discourse chiefly turned on sporting matters, I was at home with him at once, and he presently grew so familiar with me, that I almost forgot the presence in which I stood. However, his Majesty seemed in no way offended by my freedom, but, on the contrary, clapped me on the shoulder, and said, 'Maister Assheton, for a country gentleman, you 're weel-mannered, and weel-informed, and I shall be glad to see more of you while I stay in these parts.' After this, the good-natured monarch mounted his horse, and the hunting began, and a famous day's work we made of it, his Majesty killing no fewer than five fine bucks with his own hand."

"You are clearly on the road to preferment, Nicholas," observed Richard, with a smile. "You will outstrip Buckingham himself, if you go on in this way."

"So I tell him," observed Sherborne, laughing; "and, by my faith! young Sir Gilbert Hoghton, who, owing to his connexion by marriage with Buckingham, is a greater man than his father, Sir Richard, looked quite jealous, for the King more than once called out to Nicholas in the chase, and took the wood-knife from him when he broke up the last deer, which is accounted a mark of especial favour."

"Well, gentlemen," said the squire, "I shall not stand in my own light, depend upon it; and if I should bask in court sunshine, you shall partake of the rays. If I do become master of the household, in lieu of the Duke of Richmond, or master of the horse and cup-bearer to his Majesty, in place of his Grace of Buckingham, I will not forget you."

"We are greatly indebted to you, my Lord Marquess of

Downham and Duke of Pendle Hill, that is to be," rejoined Sherborne, taking off his cap, with mock reverence; "and perhaps, for the sake of your sweet sister and my spouse, Dorothy, you will make interest to have me appointed gentleman of the bed-chamber?"

"Doubt it not — doubt it not," replied Nicholas, in a patronising tone.

"My ambition soars higher than yours, Sherborne," said Richard; "I must be lord keeper of the privy seal or nothing."

"Oh! what you will, gentlemen, what you will!" cried Nicholas, "you can ask me nothing I will not grant — always provided I have the means."

A turn in the road now showed them Hoghton Tower, crowning the summit of an isolated and conical hill, about two miles off. Rising proudly in the midst of a fair and fertile plain, watered by the Ribble and the Darwen, the stately edifice seemed to command the whole country. And so King James thought, as, from the window of his chamber, he looked down upon the magnificent prospect around him, comprehending on the one hand the vast forests of Myerscough and Bowland, stretching as far as the fells near Lancaster, and, on the other, an open but still undulating country, beautifully diversified with wood and water, well-peopled and well-cultivated, green with luxuriant pastures, yellow with golden grain, or embowered with orchards, boasting many villages and small towns, as well as two lovely rivers, which combining their currents at Walton-le-Dale, gradually expanded till they neared the sea, which could be seen gleaming through openings in the distant hills. As the King surveyed this fair scene, and thought how strong was the position of the mansion, situated as it was upon high cliffs springing abruptly from the Darwen, and how favourably circumstanced, with

its forests and park, for the enjoyment of the chace, of which he was passionately fond, how capable of defence, and how well adapted for a hunting-seat, he sighed to think it did not belong to the crown. Nor was he wrong in his estimate of its strength, for in after years, during the civil wars, it held out stoutly against the parliamentary forces, and was only reduced at last by treachery, when part of its gate-tower was blown up, destroying an officer and two hundred men, "in that blast most wofully."

Though the hour was so early, the road was already thronged, not only with horsemen and pedestrians of every degree from Preston, but with rude lumbering vehicles from the neighbouring villages of Plessington, Brockholes, and Cuerden, driven by farmers, who, with their buxom dames and cherry-cheeked daughters, decked out in holiday finery, hoped to gain admittance to Hoghton Tower, or, at all events, obtain a peep of the King as he rode out to hunt. Most of these were saluted by Nicholas, who scrupled not to promise them admission to the outer court of the Tower, and even went so far as to offer some of the comelier damsels a presentation to the King. Occasionally, the road was enlivened by strains of music from a band of minstrels, by a song or a chorus from others, or by the gamesome tricks of a party of mummers. At one place, a couple of tumblers and a clown were performing their feats on a cloth stretched on the grass beneath a tree. Here the crowd collected for a few minutes, but presently gave way to loud shouts, attended by the cracking of whips, proceeding from two grooms in the yellow and white livery of Sir Richard Hoghton, who headed some half dozen carts filled with provisions, carcases of sheep and oxen, turkeys and geese, pullets and capons, fish, bread, and vegetables, all bent for Hoghton Tower; for though Sir Richard had made vast preparations for his guests, he found his sup-

plies, great as they were, wholly inadequate to their wants. Cracking their whips in answer to the shouts with which they were greeted, the purveyors galloped on, many a hungry wight looking wistfully after them.

Nicholas and his companions were now at the entrance of Hoghton Park, through which the Darwen coursed, after washing the base of the rocky heights on which the mansion was situated. Here four yeomen of the guard, armed with halberts, and an officer, were stationed, and no one was admitted without an order from Sir Richard Hoghton. Possessing a pass, the squire and his companions with their attendants were, of course, allowed to enter, but the throng accompanying them were sent over the bridge, and along a devious road skirting the park, which, though it went more than a mile round, eventually brought them to their destination.

Hoghton Park, though not very extensive, boasted a great deal of magnificent timber, and in some places was so thickly wooded that, according to Dr. Kuerden, "a man passing through it could scarce have seen the sun shine at middle of day." Into one of these tenebrous groves the horsemen now plunged, and for some moments were buried in the gloom produced by matted and overhanging boughs. Issuing once more into the warm sunshine, they traversed a long and beautiful sylvan glade, skirted by ancient oaks, with mighty arms and gnarled limbs — the patriarchs of the forest. In the open ground on the left were scattered a few ash trees, and beneath them browsed a herd of fallow deer; while crossing the lower end of the glade was a large herd of red deer, for which the park was famous, the hinds tripping nimbly and timidly away, but the lordly stags, with their branching antlers, standing for a moment at gaze, and disdainfully regarding the intruders on their domain. Little did they think how soon and severely their courage would be tried, or how soon the *mort*

would be sounded for their *pryse* by the huntsman. But if, happily for themselves, the poor leathern-coated fools could not foresee their doom, it was not equally hidden from Nicholas, who predicted what would ensue, and pointed out one noble hart which he thought worthy to die by the King's own hand. As if he understood him, the stately beast tossed his antlered head aloft, and plunged into the adjoining thicket; but the squire noted the spot where he had disappeared.

The glade led them into the chace, a glorious hunting-ground of about two miles in circumference, surrounded by an amphitheatre of wood, and studded by noble forest trees. Variety and beauty were lent to it by an occasional knoll, crowned with timber, or by numerous ferny dells and dingles. As the horsemen entered upon the chace, they observed at a short distance from them a herd of the beautiful, but fierce wild cattle, originally from Bowland Forest, and still preserved in the park. White and spangled in colour, with short sharp horns, fine eyes, and small shapely limbs, these animals were of untameable fierceness, possessed of great cunning, and ever ready to assault any one who approached them. They would often attack a solitary individual, gore him, and trample him to death. Consequently, they were far more dreaded than the wild boars, with which, as with every other sort of game, the neighbouring woods were plentifully stocked. Well aware of the danger they ran, the party watched the herd narrowly and distrustfully, and would have galloped on, but this would only have provoked pursuit, and the wild cattle were swifter than any horses. Suddenly, a milk-white bull trotted out from the rest of the herd, bellowing fiercely, lashing his sides with his tail, and lowering his head to the ground, as if meditating an attack. His example was speedily followed by the others, and the whole herd began to beat the ground and roar loudly. Much alarmed by these hostile manifesta-

tions, the party were debating whether to stand the onset, or trust to the fleetness of their steeds for safety, when just as the whole herd, with tails erect, and dilated nostrils were galloping towards them, assistance appeared in the persons of some ten or a dozen mounted prickers, who, armed with long poles pointed with iron, issued with loud shouts from an avenue opening upon the chace. At sight of them, the whole herd wheeled round and fled, but were pursued by the prickers till they were driven into the depths of the furthest thicket. Six of the prickers remained watching over them during the day, in order that the royal hunting party might not be disturbed, and the woods echoed with the bellowing of the angry brutes.

While this was going forward, the squire and his companions, congratulating themselves on their narrow escape, galloped off, and entered the long avenue of sycamores, from which the prickers had emerged.

At the head of a steep ascent, partly hewn out of the rock, and partly skirted by venerable and majestic trees, forming a continuation of the avenue, rose the embattled gate-tower of the proud edifice they were approaching, and which now held the monarch of the land, and the highest and noblest of his court as guest s within its halls. From the top of the central tower of the gateway floated the royal banner, while at the very moment the party reached the foot of the hill, they were saluted by a loud peal of ordnance discharged from the side towers, proclaiming that the King had arisen; and as the smoke from the culverins wreathed round the standard, a flourish of trumpets was blown from the walls, and martial music resounded from the court.

Roused by these stirring sounds, Nicholas spurred his horse up the rocky ascent, and followed closely by his companions, who were both nearly as much excited as himself,

speedily gained the great gateway — a massive and majestic structure, occupying the centre of the western front of the mansion, and consisting of three towers of great strength and beauty, the mid tower far over-topping the other two, as in the arms of Old Castile, and sustaining, as was its right, the royal standard. On the platform stood the trumpeters with their silk-fringed clarions, and the iron mouths of the cu verins, which had been recently discharged, protruded through the battlements. The arms and motto of the Hoghtons, carved in stone, were placed upon the gateway, with the letters T. H., the initials of the founder of the tower. Immediately above the arched entrance was the sculptured figure of a knight slaying a dragon.

In front of the gateway a large crowd of persons were assembled, consisting of the inferior gentry of the neighbourhood with their wives, daughters, and servants, clergymen, attornies, chirurgeons, farmers, and tradesmen of all kind from the adjoining towns of Blackburn, Preston, Chorley, Haslingden, Garstang, and even Lancaster. Representatives in some sort or other of almost every town and village in the county might be found amongst the motley assemblage, which, early as it was, numbered several hundreds, many of those from the more distant places having quitted their homes soon after midnight. Admittance was naturally sought by all, but here the same rule was observed as at the park gate, and no one was allowed to enter, even the base court, without authority from the lord of the mansion. The great gates were closed, and two files of halberdiers were drawn up under the deep archway, to keep the passage clear, and quell disturbance in case any should occur; while a gigantic porter, stationed in front of the wicket, rigorously scrutinised the passes. These precautions naturally produced delay, and though many of the better part of the crowd were entitled to ad-

mission, it was not without much pushing and squeezing, and considerable detriment to their gay apparel, that they were enabled to effect their object.

The comfort of those outside the walls had not, however, been altogether neglected by Sir Richard Hoghton, for sheds were reared under the trees, where stout March beer, together with cheese and bread, or oaten cakes and butter, were freely distributed to all applicants; so that, if some were disappointed, few were discontented, especially when told that the gates would be thrown open at noon, when, during the time the King and the nobles feasted in the great banquet-hall, they might partake of a wild bull from the park, slaughtered expressly for the occasion, which was now being roasted whole within the base court. That the latter was no idle promise they had the assurance of thick smoke rising above the walls, laden with the scent of roast meat, and, moreover, they could see through the wicket a great fire blazing and crackling on the green, with a huge carcase on an immense spit before it, and a couple of turn-broaches basting it.

As Nicholas and his companions forced their way through this crowd, which was momently receiving additions as fresh arrivals took place, the squire recognised many old acquaintances, and was nodding familiarly right and left, when he encountered a woman's eye fixed keenly upon him, and to his surprise beheld Nance Redferne. Nance, who had lost none of her good looks, was very gaily attired, with her fine chestnut hair knotted with ribands, her stomacher similarly adorned, and her red petticoat looped up, so as to display an exceedingly trim ancle and small foot; and under other circumstances, Nicholas might not have minded staying to chat with her, but just now it was out of the question, and he hastily turned his head another way. As ill luck, however, would have it, a stoppage occurred at the moment, during

which Nance forced her way up to him, and taking hold of his arm, said in a low tone,

"Yo mun tae me in wi' ye, squoire."

"Take you in with me — impossible," cried Nicholas.

"Nah! it 's neaw impossible," rejoined Nance, pertinaciously; "yo con do it, an yo shan. Yo owe me a good turn, and mun repay it now."

"But why the devil do you want to go in?" cried Nicholas, impatiently. "You know the King is the sworn enemy of all witches, and amongst this concourse, some one is sure to recognise you, and betray you. I cannot answer for your safety if I do take you in. In my opinion, you were extremely unwise to venture here at all."

"Ne'er heed my wisdom or my folly, boh do as ey bid yo, or yo'n repent it," said Nance.

"Why, you can get in without my aid," observed the squire, trying to laugh it off. "You can easily fly over the walls."

"Ey ha' left my broomstick a-whoam," replied Nance — "boh no more jesting. Win yo do it?"

"Well, well, I suppose I must," replied Nicholas, "but I wash my hands of the consequences. If ill comes of it I am not to blame. You must go in as Doll Wango — that is as a character in the masque to be enacted to-night — d'ye mark?"

Nance signified that she perfectly understood him.

The whole of this hurried discourse, conducted in an undertone, passed unheard and unnoticed by the bystanders. Just then, an opening took place amid the crowd, and the squire pushed through it, hoping to get rid of his companion, but he hoped in vain, for clinging to his saddle she went on along with him.

They were soon under the deep groined and ribbed arch of the gate, and Nance would have been here turned back by

the foremost halberdier, if Nicholas had not signified somewhat hastily that she belonged to his party. The man smiled and offered no further opposition; and the gigantic porter next advancing, Nicholas exhibited his pass to him, which appearing sufficiently comprehensive to procure admission for Richard and Sherborne, they instantly availed themselves of the license, while the squire fumbled in his doublet for a further order for Nance. At last he produced it, and after reading it, the gigantic warder exclaimed, with a smile illumining his broad features,

"Ah! I see; — this is an order from his worship Sir Richard to admit a certain woman, who is to enact Doll Wango in the masque. This is she, I suppose?" he added, looking at Nance.

"Ay, ay," replied the squire.

"A comely wench, by the mass," exlaimed the porter. "Open the gate."

"No — not yet — not yet, good porter, till my claim be adjusted," cried another woman, pushing forward, quite as young and comely as Nance, and equally gaily dressed. "I am the real Doll Wango, though I be generally known as Dame Tetlow. The squire engaged me to play the part before the King, and now this saucy hussey has taken my place. But I 'll have my rights, that I will."

"Odd's heart! two Doll Wangos!" exclaimed the porter, opening his eyes.

"Two! — Nay, beleedy! boh there be three," exclaimed an immensely tall, stoutly proportioned woman, stepping up, to the increased confusion of the squire, and the infinite merriment of the bystanders, whose laughter had been already excited by the previous part of the scene. "Didna yo tell me at Myerscough to come here, squire, an ey, Bess Baldwyn, should play Doll Wango to your Jem Tospot?"

"Play the devil, for that 's what you all seem bent upon doing," exclaimed the squire, impatiently. "Away with you! I can have nothing to say to you!"

"You gave me the same promise at the Castle at Preston last night," said Dame Tetlow.

"I had been drinking, and knew not what I said," rejoined Nicholas, angrily.

"Boh yo promised me, a few minutes ago, an yo 're sober enough now," cried Nance.

"Ey dunna knoa that," rejoined Dame Baldwyn, looking reproachfully at him. "Boh what ey dun knoa is, that nother o' these squemous queans shan ge in efore me."

And she looked menacingly at them, as if determined to oppose their ingress, much to the alarm of the timorous Dame Tetlow, though Nance returned her angry glances unmoved.

"For heaven's sake, my good fellow, let them all three in," said Nicholas, in a low tone to the porter, at the same time slipping a gold piece into his hand, "or there 's no saying what may be the consequence, for they 're three infernal viragos. I 'll take the responsibility of their admittance upon myself with Sir Richard."

"Well, as your worship says I don't like to see quarrelling amongst women," returned the porter, in a bland tone, "so all three shall go in; and as to who is to play Doll Wango, the Master of the Ceremonies will settle that, so you need give yourself no more concern about it; but if I were called upon to decide," he added, with an amorous leer at Dame Baldwyn, whose proportions so well matched his own, "I know where my choice would light. There now!" he shouted, "Open wide the gate for Squire Nicholas Assheton, of Downham, and the three Doll Wangos."

And all obstacles being thus removed, Nicholas passed on with the three females amidst the renewed laughter of the

bystanders. But he got rid of his plagues as soon as he could, for, dismounting and throwing his bridle to an attendant, he vouchsafed not a word to any of them, but stepped quickly after Richard and Sherborne, who had already reached the great fire with the bull roasting before it.

Appropriated chiefly to stables and other offices, the base court of Hoghton Tower consisted of buildings of various dates, the greater part belonging to Elizabeth's time, though some might be assigned to an earlier period, while many alterations and additions had been recently made in anticipation of the King's visit. Dating back as far as Henry II., the family had originally fixed their residence at the foot of the hill, on the banks of the Darwen, but in process of time, swayed by prouder notions, they mounted the craggy heights above, and built a tower upon their crest. It is melancholy to think, that so glorious a pile, teeming with so many historical recollections, and so magnificently situated, should be abandoned, and suffered to go to decay; — the family having many years ago quitted it for Walton Hall, near Walton-le-Dale, and consigned it to the occupation of a few gamekeepers. Bereft of its venerable timber, its courts grass grown, its fine oak staircase rotting and dilapidated, its domestic chapel neglected, its marble chamber broken and ruinous, its wainscotings and ceilings cracked and mouldering, its paintings mildewed and half effaced, Hoghton Tower presents only the wreck of its former grandeur. Desolate indeed are its halls, and their glory for ever departed. However, this history has to do with it in the season of its greatest splendour; when it glistened with silks and velvets, and resounded with loud laughter and blithe music; when stately nobles and lovely dames were seen in the gallery, and a royal banquet was served in the great hall; when its countless chambers were filled to overflowing, and its passages echoed

with hasty feet; when the base-court was full of huntsmen and falconers, and enlivened by the neighing of steeds and the baying of hounds; when there was daily hunting in the park, and nightly dancing and diversion in the hall, — it is with Hoghton Tower at this season that the present tale has to do, and not with it as it is now — silent, solitary, squalid, saddening, but still whispering of the glories of the past, still telling of the kingly pageant that once graced it.

The base-court was divided from the court of lodging by the great hall and domestic chapel. A narrow vaulted passage on either side led to the upper quadrangle, the façade of which was magnificent, and far superior in uniformity of design and style to the rest of the structure, the irregularity of which, however, was not unpleasing. The whole frontage of the upper court was richly moulded and filleted, with ranges of mullion and transom windows, capitals, and carved parapets crowned with stone balls. Marble pillars, in the Italian style, had been recently placed near the porch, with two rows of pilasters above them, supporting a heavy marble cornice, on which rested the carved escutcheon of the family. A flight of stone steps led up to the porch, and within was a wide oak staircase, so gentle of ascent, that a man on horseback could easily mount it, a feat often practised in later days by one of the descendants of the house. In this part of the mansion all the principal apartments were situated, and here James was lodged. Here also was the green room, so called from its hangings, which he used for private conferences, and which was hung round with portraits of his unfortunate mother, Mary Queen of Scots; of her implacable enemy, Queen Elizabeth; of his consort, Anne of Bohemia; and of Sir Thomas Hoghton, the founder of the tower. Adjoining it was the Star-Chamber, occupied by the Duke of Buckingham, with its napkin pannelling, and ceiling "fretted with

golden fires;" and in the same angle were rooms occupied by the Duke of Richmond, the Earls of Pembroke and Nottingham, and Lord Howard of Effingham. Below was the library, whither Doctor Thomas Moreton, Bishop of Chester, and his Majesty's chaplain, with the three puisné judges of the King's Bench, Sir John Doddridge, Sir John Crooke, and Sir Robert Hoghton, all of whom were guests of Sir Richard, resorted; and in the adjoining wing was the great gallery, where the whole of the nobles and courtiers passed such of their time — and that was not much — as was not occupied in feasting or out-of-doors' amusements.

Long corridors ran round the upper stories in this part of the mansion, and communicated with an endless series of rooms, which, numerous as they were, were all occupied, and, accommodation being found impossible for the whole of the guests, many were sent to the new erections in the base-court, which had been planned to meet the emergency by the magnificent and provident host. The nobles and gentlemen were, however, far outnumbered by their servants, and the confusion occasioned by the running to and fro of the various grooms of the chambers, was indescribable. Doublets had to be brushed, ruffs plaited, hair curled, beards trimmed, and all with the greatest possible expedition, so that, as soon as day dawned upon Hoghton Tower, there was a prodigious racket from one end of it to the other. Many favoured servants slept in truckle-beds in their masters' rooms; but others, not so fortunate, and unable to find accommodation even in the garrets, for the smallest rooms, and those nearest the roof, were put in requisition, slept upon the benches in the hall, while several sat up all night carousing in the great kitchen, keeping company with the cooks and their assistants, who were busied all the time in preparations for the feasting of the morrow.

Such was the state of things inside Hoghton Tower early on the eventful morning in question, and out of doors, especially in the base-court which Nicholas was traversing, the noise, bustle, and confusion were equally great. Wide as was the area, it was filled with various personages, some newly arrived, and seeking information as to their quarters, — not very easily obtained, for it seemed everybody's business to ask questions, and no one's to answer them — some gathered in groups round the falconers and huntsmen, who had suddenly risen into great importance; others, and these were for the most part smart young pages, in brilliant liveries, chattering, and making love to every pretty damsel they encountered, putting them out of countenance by their license and strange oaths, and rousing the anger of their parents, and the jealousy of their rustic admirers; others, of a graver sort, with dress of formal cut, and puritanical expression of countenance, shrugging their shoulders, and looking sourly on the whole proceedings — luckily they were in the minority, for the generality of the groups were composed of lively and light-hearted people, bent apparently upon amusement, and tolerably certain of finding it. Through these various groups numerous lacqueys were passing swiftly and continuously to and fro, bearing a cap, a mantle, or a sword, and pushing aside all who interfered with their progress, with a "by your leave, my masters, — your pardon, fair mistress," — or "out of my way, knave!" and as the stables occupied one entire angle of the court, there were grooms without end dressing the horses at the doors, watering them at the troughs, or leading them about amid the admiring or criticising bystanders. The King's horses were, of course, objects of special attraction, and such as could obtain a glimpse of them and of the royal coach thought themselves specially favoured. Besides what was going for-

ward below the windows looking into the court were all full of curious observers, and much loud conversation took place between those placed at them and their friends underneath. From all this some idea will be formed of the tremendous din that prevailed; but though with much confusion there was no positive disorder, still less brawling, for yeomen-of-the-guard being stationed at various points, perfect order was maintained. Several minstrels, mummers, and merry-makers, in various fantastic habits, swelled the throng, enlivening it with their strains or feats, and amongst other privileged characters admitted was a Tom o' Bedlam, a half-crazed licensed beggar, in a singular and picturesque garb, with a plate of tin engraved with his name attached to his left arm, and a great ox's horn, which he was continually blowing, suspended by a leathern baldric from his neck.

Scarcely had Nicholas joined his companions, than word was given that the king was about to attend morning prayers in the domestic chapel. Upon this, an immediate rush was made in that direction by the crowd, but the greater part were kept back by the guard, who crossed their halberts to prevent their ingress, and a few only were allowed to enter the anti-chamber leading to the chapel, amongst whom were the squire and his companions.

Here they were detained within it till service was over, and, as prayers were read by the Bishop of Chester, and the whole Court was present, this was a great disappointment to them. At the end of half-an-hour two very courtly personages came forth, each bearing a white wand, and announcing that the King was coming forth, the assemblage immediately divided into two lines to allow a passage for the monarch. Nicholas Assheton informed Richard in a whisper that the foremost and stateliest of the two gentlemen was Lord Stanhope, of Harrington, the Vice-Chamberlain, and the other,

a handsome young man of slight figure and somewhat libertine expression of countenance, was the renowned Sir John Finett, Master of the Ceremonies. Notwithstanding his licentiousness, however, which was the vice of the age and the stain of the court, Sir John was a man of wit and address, and perfectly conversant with the duties of his office, of which he has left satisfactory evidence in an amusing tractate, "Finetti Philoxenis."

Some little time elapsed before the King made his appearance, during which the curiosity of such as had not seen him, as was the case with Richard, was greatly excited. The young man wondered whether the pedantic monarch, whose character perplexed the shrewdest, would answer his preconceived notions, and whether it would turn out that his portraits were like him. While these thoughts were passing through his mind, a shuffling noise was heard without, and King James appeared at the doorway. He paused there for a moment to place his plumed and jewelled cap upon his head, and to speak a word with Sir John Finett, and during this Richard had an opportunity of observing him. The portraits *were* like, but the artists had flattered him, though not much. There was great shrewdness of look, but there was also a vacant expression, which seemed to contradict the idea of profound wisdom generally ascribed to him. When in perfect repose, which they were not for more than a minute, the features were thoughtful, benevolent, and pleasing, and Richard began to think him quite handsome, when another change was wrought by some remark of Sir John Finett. As the Master of the Ceremonies told his tale, the King's fine dark eyes blazed with an unpleasant light, and he laughed so loudly and indecorously at the close of the narrative, with his great tongue hanging out of his mouth, and tears running down his cheeks, that the young man was

quite sickened. The King's face was thin and long, the cheeks shaven, but the lips clothed with moustaches, and a scanty beard covered his chin. The hair was brushed away from the face, and the cap placed at the back of the head, so as to exhibit a high bald forehead, of which he was prodigiously vain. James was fully equipped for the chace, and wore a green silk doublet, quilted as all his garments were so as to be dagger-proof, enormous trunk-hose, likewise thickly stuffed, and buff boots, fitting closely to the leg, and turned slightly over at the knee, with the edges fringed with gold. This was almost the only appearance of finery about the dress, except a row of gold buttons down the jerkin. Attached to his girdle he wore a large pouch, with the mouth drawn together by silken cords, and a small silver bugle was suspended from his neck by a baldric of green silk. Stiffly-starched bands, edged with lace, and slightly turned down on either side of the face, completed his attire. There was nothing majestic, but the very reverse, in the King's deportment, and he seemed only kept upright by the exceeding stiffness of his cumbersome clothes. With the appearance of being corpulent, he was not so in reality, and his weak legs and bent knees were scarcely able to support his frame. He always used a stick, and generally sought the additional aid of a favourite's arm.

In this instance the person selected was Sir Gilbert Hoghton, the eldest son of Sir Richard, and subsequent owner of Hoghton Tower. Indebted for the high court favour he enjoyed partly to his graceful person and accomplishments, and partly to his marriage, having espoused a daughter of Sir John Aston of Cranford, who, as sister of the Duchess of Buckingham, and a descendant of the blood royal of the Stuarts, was a great help to his rapid rise, the handsome young knight was skilled in all manly exercises, and cited as a model of grace in

the dance. Constant in attendance upon the court, he frequently took part in the masques performed before it. Like the King, he was fully equipped for hunting; but greater contrast could not have been found than between his tall fine form and the King's ungainly figure. Sir Gilbert had remained behind with the rest of the courtiers in the chapel, but, calling him, James seized his arm, and set forward at his usual shambling pace. As he went on, nodding his head in return to the profound salutations of the assemblage, his eye rolled round them until it alighted on Richard Assheton, and, nudging Sir Gilbert, he asked,

"Wha 's that? — a bonnie lad, but waesome pale."

Sir Gilbert, however, was unable to answer the inquiry; but Nicholas, who stood beside the young man, was determined not to lose the opportunity of introducing him, and accordingly, moved a step forward, and made a profound obeisance.

"This youth, may it please your Majesty," he said, "is my cousin, Richard Assheton, son and heir of Sir Richard Assheton, of Middleton, one of your Majesty's most loyal and devoted servants, and who, I trust, will have the honour of being presented to you in the course of the day."

"We trust so, too, Maister Nicholas Assheton — for that, if we dinna forget, is your ain name," replied James; "and if the sire resembles the son, whilk is not always the case, as our gude freend, Sir Gilbert, is evidence, being as unlike his worthy father as a man weel can be; if, as we say, Sir Richard resembles this callant, he must be a weel-faur'd gentleman. But, God's santie, lad! how came you in sic sad and sombre abulyiements? Hae ye nae braw claiths to put on to grave our coming? Black is na the fashion at our court, as Sir Gilbert will tell ye, and though a suit o' sables may become you, it's na

pleasing in our sight. Let us see you in gayer apparel at dinner."

Richard, who was considerably embarrassed by the royal address, merely bowed, and Nicholas again took upon himself to answer for him.

"Your Majesty will be pleased to pardon him," he said, "but he is unaccustomed to court fashions, having passed all his time in a wild and uncivilised district, where, except on rare and happy occasions like the present, the refined graces of life seldom reach us."

"Weel, we wouldna be hard upon him," said the King, good-naturedly, "and mayhap the family has sustained some recent loss, and he is in mourning."

"I cannot offer that excuse for him, Sire," replied Nicholas, who began to flatter himself he was making considerable progress in the monarch's good graces. "It is simply an affair of the heart."

"Puir chiel! we pity him," cried the King. "And sae it is a hopeless suit, young Sir?" he added to Richard. "Canna we throw in a good word for ye? Do we ken the lassie, and is she to be here to-day?"

"I am quite at a loss how to answer your Majesty's questions," replied Richard, "and my cousin Nicholas has very unfairly betrayed my secret."

"Hoot, toot! nah, lad," exclaimed James, "it was not he wha betrayed your secret, but our ain discernment that revealed it to us. We kenned your ailment at a glance. Few things are hidden from the King's eye, and we could tell ye mair aboot yourself, and the lassie you 're deeing for, if we cared to speak it; but just now we have other fish to fry, and must awa' and break our fast, of the which, if truth maun be spoken, we stand greatly in need, for creature comforts maun be aye looked to as weel as spiritual wants, though the latter

should be ever cared for first, as is our ain rule, and in so doing we offer an example to our subjects, which they will do weel to follow. Later in the day, we will talk further to you on the subject; but, meanwhile, gie us the name of your lassie loo."

"Oh! spare me, your Majesty," cried Richard.

"Her name is Alizon Nutter," interposed Nicholas.

"What! a daughter of Alice Nutter, of Rough Lee?" exclaimed James.

"The same, Sire," replied Nicholas, much surprised at the extent of information manifested by the King.

"Why, saul o' my body! man, she 's a witch — a witch! d'ye ken that?" cried the King, with a look of abhorrence; "a mischievous and malignant vermin with which this pairt of our realm is sair plagued, but which, with God's help, we will thoroughly extirpate. Sae the lass is a daughter of Alice Nutter, ha! That accounts for your grewsome looks, lad. Odd's life! I see it all now. I understand what is the matter with you. Look at him, Sir Gilbert — look at him, I say. Does nothing strike you as strange about him?"

"Nothing more than that he is naturally embarrassed by your Majesty's mode of speech," replied the knight.

"You lack the penetration of the King, Sir Gilbert," cried James. "I will tell you what ails him. He is bewitchit — forespoken."

Exclamations were uttered by all the bystanders, and every eye was fixed on Richard, who felt ready to sink to the ground.

"I affirm he is bewitchit," continued the King; "and wha sae likely to do it as the glamouring hizzie that has ensnared him? She has ill bluid in her veins, and can chant deevil's cantrips as weel as the mither, or ony gyre-carling o' them a'."

"You are mistaken, Sire," cried Richard, earnestly. "Ali-

zon will be here to-day with my father and sister, and if you deign to receive her, I am sure you will judge her differently."

"We shall perpend the point of receiving her," replied the King, gravely. "But we are rarely mista'en, young man, and seldom change our opinion, except upon gude grounds, and those you are na like to offer us. Belike ye ha' been lang ill?"

"Oh! no, your Majesty, I was suddenly seized, about a month ago," replied Richard.

"Suddenly seized — eh!" exclaimed James, winking cunningly at those near him; "and ye swarfit awa' wi' the pain? I guessed it. And whaur was Alizon the while?"

"At that time she was a guest at Middleton," replied Richard; "but it is impossible my illness can in any way be attributed to her. I will answer with my life for her perfect innocence."

"You may have to answer wi' your life for your misplaced faith in her," said the King; "but I tell you nothing — nothing wicked, at all events — is impossible to witches, and the haill case, even by your own showin', is very suspicious. I have heard somewhat of the story of Alice Nutter, but not the haill truth — but there are folk here wha can enlighten us mair fully. Thus much I do ken — that she is a notorious witch, and a fugitive from justice, though aiblins you, Maister Nicholas Assheton, could give an inkling of her hiding-place if you were so disposed. Nay, never look doited man," he added, laughing. "I bring nae charges against you. Ye are na' on your trial noo. But this is a serious matter, and maun be seriously considered before we dismiss it. You say Alizon will be here to-day. So far weel. Canna you contrive to produce the mother, too, Maister Nicholas?"

"Sire!" exclaimed Nicholas.

"Nay, then, we must gang our ain way to wark," continued James. "We are tauld ye ha' a petition to offer us, and our

will and pleasure is that you present it afore we go forth to the chace, and after we have partaken of our matutinal refection, whilk we will no langer delay; for, sooth to say, we are weel nigh famished. Look ye, Sirs. Neither of you is to quit Hoghton Tower without our permission had and obtained. We do not place you under arrest — neither do we inhibit you from the chace, or from any other sports, but you are to remain here at our sovereign pleasure. Have we your word that you will not attempt to disobey the injunction?"

"You have mine, undoubtedly, Sire," replied Richard.

"And mine, too," added Nicholas. "And I hope to justify myself before your Majesty."

"We shall be weel pleased to hear ye do it, man," rejoined the King, laughing, and shuffling on. "But we hae our doubts — we hae our doubts."

"His Majesty talks of going to breakfast, and says he is famished," observed Nicholas to Sherborne, as the King departed, "but he has completely taken away my appetite."

"No wonder," replied the other.

CHAPTER VII.

The royal declaration concerning lawful sports on the Sunday.

Not many paces after the King marched the Duke of Buckingham, then in the zenith of his power, and in the full perfection of his unequalled beauty, eclipsing all the rest of the nobles in splendour of apparel, as he did in stateliness of deportment. Haughtily returning the salutations made him, which were scarcely less reverential than those addressed to the monarch himself, the prime favourite moved on, all eyes following his majestic figure to the door. Buckingham walked alone, as if he had been a prince of the blood; but after him came a throng of nobles, consisting of the Earl of Pembroke,

High Chamberlain; the Duke of Richmond, Master of the Household; the Earl of Nottingham, Lord High Admiral; Viscount Brackley, Lord Howard of Effingham, Lord Zouche, President of Wales; with the Lords Knollys, Mordaunt, Compton, and Grey of Groby. One or two of the noblemen seemed inclined to question Richard as to what had passed between him and the King, but the young man's reserved and somewhat stern manner deterred them. Next came the three judges, Doddridge, Crooke, and Hoghton, whose countenances wore an enforced gravity, for if any faith could be placed in rubicund cheeks and portly persons, they were not indisposed to self-indulgence and conviviality. After the judges, came the Bishop of Chester, the King's chaplain, who had officiated on the present occasion, and who was in his full pontifical robes. He was accompanied by the lord of the mansion, Sir Richard Hoghton, a hale handsome man between fifty and sixty, with silvery hair and beard, a robust but commanding person, a fresh complexion, and features, by no means warranting, from any marked dissimilarity to those of his son, the King's scandalous jest.

A crowd of baronets and knights succeeded, including Sir Arthur Capel, Sir Thomas Brudenell, Sir Edward Montague, Sir Edmund Trafford, sheriff of the county, Sir Edward Mosley, and Sir Ralph Assheton. The latter looked grave and anxious, and, as he passed his relatives, said, in a low tone, to Richard,

"I am told Alizon is to be here to-day. Is it so?"

"She is," replied the young man; "but why do you ask? Is she in danger? If so, let her be warned against coming."

"On no account," replied Sir Ralph; "that would only increase the suspicion already attaching to her. No; she must face the danger, and I hope will be able to avert it."

"But what *is* the danger?" asked Richard. "In heaven's name, speak more plainly."

"I cannot do so now," replied Sir Ralph. "We will take counsel together anon. Her enemies are at work; and if you tarry here a few minutes longer you will understand whom I mean."

And he passed on.

A large crowd now poured indiscriminately out of the chapel, and amongst it Nicholas perceived many of his friends and neighbours, Mr. Townley, of Townley Park, Mr. Parker, of Browsholme, Mr. Shuttleworth, of Gawthorpe, Sir Thomas Metcalfe, and Roger Nowell. With the latter was Master Potts, and Richard was then at no loss to understand against whom Sir Ralph had warned him. A fierce light blazed in Roger Nowell's keen eyes as he first remarked the two Asshetons, and a smile of gratified vengeance played about his lips, but he quelled the fire in a moment, and compressing his hard mouth more closely, bowed coldly and ceremoniously to them. Metcalfe did the same. Not so Master Potts. Halting for a moment, he said, with a spiteful look, "Look to yourself, Master Nicholas; and you, too, Master Richard. A day of reckoning is coming for both of you."

And with this, he sprang nimbly after his client.

"What means the fellow!" cried Nicholas. "But that we are here as it were in the precincts of a palace, I would after him and cudgel him soundly for his insolence."

"And wha's that ye'd be after dinging, mon?" cried a sharp voice behind him. "Na that puir feckless body that has jist skippit aff. If sae, ye'll ta the wrang soo by the lugg, and I counsel you to let him bide, for he's high i' favour wi' the King."

Turning at this address, Nicholas recognised the king's jester, Archie Armstrong, a merry little knave, with light blue

eyes, long yellow hair hanging about his ears, and a sandy beard. There was a great deal of mother wit about Archie, and quite as much shrewdness as folly. He wore no distinctive dress as jester, — the bauble and coxcomb having been long discontinued, — but was simply clad in the royal livery.

"And so Master Potts is in favour with his Majesty, eh, Archie?" asked the squire, hoping to obtain some information from him.

"And sae war you the day afore yesterday when you hunted at Myerscough," replied the jester.

"But how have I forfeited the King's good opinion?" asked Nicholas. "Come, you are a good fellow, Archie, and will tell me."

"Dinna think to fleech me, mon," replied the jester, cunningly. "I ken what I ken, and that 's mair than you 'll get frae me wi' a' your speering. The King's secrets are safe wi' Archie — and for a gude reason, that he is never tauld them. You 're a gude huntsman, and sae is his Majesty, but there 's ae kind o' game he likes better than anither, and that 's to be found maistly i' these pairts — I mean witches, and sic like fearfu' carlines. We maun hae the country rid of them, and that 's what his majesty intends, and if you 're a wise man you 'll lend him a helping hand. But I maun in to disjune."

And with this the jester capered off, leaving Nicholas like one stupified. He was roused, however, by a smart slap on the shoulder from Sir John Finett.

"What! pondering over the masque, Master Nicholas, or thinking of the petition you have to present to his Majesty?" cried the Master of the Ceremonies. "Let neither trouble you. The one will be well played, I doubt not, and the other well received, I am sure, for I know the King's sentiments on the subject. But touching the dame, Master Nicholas — have you found one willing and able to take part in the masque?"

"I have found several willing, Sir John," replied Nicholas; "but as to their ability that is another question. However, one of them may do as a make-shift. They are all in the base-court, and shall wait on you when you please, and then you can make your election."

"So far well," replied Finett; "it may be that we shall have Ben Jonson here to-day — rare Ben, the prince of poets and of masque writers. Sir Richard Hoghton expects him. Ben is preparing a masque for Christmas, to be called 'The Vision of Delight,' in which his highness the prince is to be a principal actor, and some verses which have been recited to me are amongst the daintiest ever indited by the bard."

"It will be a singular pleasure to me to see him," said Nicholas; "for I hold Ben Jonson in the highest esteem as a poet — ay, above them all, unless it be Will Shakspeare."

"Ay, you do well to except Shakspeare," rejoined Sir John Finett. "Great as Ben Jonson is, and for wit and learning no man surpasses him, he is not to be compared with Shakspeare, who for profound knowledge of nature, and of all the highest qualities of dramatic art, is unapproachable. But ours is a learned court, Master Nicholas, and therefore we have a learned poet; but a right good fellow is Ben Jonson, and a boon companion, though somewhat prone to sarcasm, as you will find if you drink with him. Over his cups he will rail at courts and courtiers in good set terms I promise you, and I myself have come in for his gibes. However, I love him none the less for his quips, for I know it is his humour to utter them, and so overlook what in another and less deserving person I should assuredly resent. But is not that young man, who is now going forth, your cousin, Richard Assheton? I thought so. The King has had a strange tale whispered in his ear, that the youth has been bewitched by a maiden — Alizon Nutter I think she is named — of whom he is enamoured. I

know not what truth there may be in the charge, but the youth himself seems to warrant it, for he looks ghastly ill. A letter was sent to his Majesty at Myerscough, communicating this and certain other particulars with which I am not acquainted; but I know they relate to some professors of the black art in your county, the soil of which seems favourable to the growth of such noxious weeds, and at first he was much disturbed by it, but in the end decided that both parties should be brought hither without being made aware of his design, that he might see and judge for himself in the matter. Accordingly, a messenger was sent over to Middleton Hall as from Sir Richard Hoghton, inviting the whole family to the Tower, and giving Sir Richard Assheton to understand it was the King's pleasure he should bring with him a certain young damsel, named Alizon Nutter, of whom mention had been made to him. Sir Richard had no choice but to obey, and promised compliance with his Majesty's injunctions. An officer, however, was left on the watch, and this very morning reported to his Majesty that young Richard Assheton had already set out with the intention of going to Preston, but had passed the night at Walton-le-Dale, and that Sir Richard, his daughter Dorothy, and Alizon Nutter, would be here before noon."

"His Majesty has laid his plans carefully," replied Nicholas, "and I can easily conjecture from whom he received the information, which is as false as it is malicious. But are you aware, Sir John, upon what evidence the charge is supported — for mere suspicion is not enough?"

"In cases of witchcraft, suspicion *is* enough," replied the knight, gravely. "Slender proofs are required. The girl is the daughter of a notorious witch — that is against her. The young man is ailing — that is against her too. But a witness, I believe, will be produced, though who I cannot say."

"Gracious heaven! what wickedness there must be in the

world when such a charge can be brought against one so good and so unoffending," cried Nicholas. "A maiden more devout than Alizon never existed, nor one holding the crime she is charged with in greater abhorrence. She injure Richard! she would lay down her life for him — and would have been his wife, but for scruples the most delicate and disinterested on her part. But we will establish her innocence before his Majesty, and confound her enemies."

"It is with that hope that I have given you this information, Sir, of which I am sure you will make no improper use," replied Sir John. "I have heard a similar character to that you have given of Alizon, and am unwilling she should fall a victim to art or malice. Be upon your guard, too, Master Nicholas, for other investigations will take place at the same time, and some matters may come forth in which you are concerned. The King's arms are long, and reach and strike far — and his eyes see clearly when not hoodwinked — or when other people see for him. And now, good Sir, you must want breakfast. Here Faryington," he added to an attendant, "show Master Nicholas Assheton to his lodging in the base-court, and attend upon him as if he were your master. I will come for you, Sir, when it is time to present the petition to the King."

So saying, he bowed and walked forth, turning into the upper quadrangle, while Nicholas followed Faryngton into the lower court, where he found his friends waiting for him.

Speedily ascertaining where their lodgings were situated, Faryngton led them to a building on the left, almost opposite the great bonfire, and ascending a flight of steps, ushered them into a commodious and well-furnished room, looking into the court. This done, he disappeared, but soon afterwards returned with two yeomen of the kitchen, one carrying a tray of provisions upon his head, and the other sustaining a basket of wine under his arm, and a snowy napkin being laid upon the

table, trenchers, viands, and flasks were soon arranged in very tempting order — so tempting, indeed, that the squire, notwithstanding his assertion that his appetite had been taken away, fell to work with his customary vigour, and plied a flask of excellent Bordeaux, so incessantly, that another had to be placed before him. Sherborne did equal justice to the good cheer, and Richard not only forced himself to eat, but to the squire's great surprise swallowed more than one deep draught of wine. Having thus administered to the wants of the guests, and seeing his presence was no longer either necessary or desired, Faryngton vanished, first promising to go and see that all was got ready for them in the sleeping apartments. Notwithstanding the man's civility, there was an over-officiousness about him that made Nicholas suspect he was placed over them by Sir John Finett to watch their movements, and he resolved to be upon his guard.

"I am glad to see you drink, lad," he observed to Richard, as soon as they were alone; "a cup of wine will do you good."

"Do you think so?" replied Richard, filling his goblet anew. "I want to get back my spirits and strength — to sustain myself no matter how — to look well — ha! ha! If I can only make this frail machine carry me stoutly through the King's visit, I care not how soon it falls to pieces afterwards."

"I see your motive, Dick," replied Nicholas, "you hope to turn away suspicion from Alizon by this device; but you must not go to excess, or you will defeat your scheme."

"I will do something to convince the King he is mistaken in me, — that I am not bewitched," cried Richard, rising and striding across the room. "Bewitched! and by Alizon, too! I could laugh at the charge, but that it is too horrible. Had any other than the King breathed it, I would have slain him."

"His majesty has been abused by the malice of that knavish attorney, Potts, who has always manifested the

greatest hostility towards Alizon," said Nicholas; "but he will not prevail, for she has only to show herself to dispel all prejudice."

"You are right, Nicholas," cried Richard, "and yet the King seems already to have prejudged her, and his obstinacy may lead to her destruction."

"Speak not so loudly, Dick, in Heaven's name," said the squire, in alarm; "these walls may have ears, and echoes may repeat every word you utter."

"Then let them tell the King that Alizon is innocent," cried Richard, stopping, and replenishiug his goblet. "Here 's to her health, and confusion to her enemies!"

"I 'll drink that toast with pleasure, Dick," replied the squire; "but I must forbid you more wine. You are not used to it, and the fumes will mount to your brain."

"Come and sit down beside us that we may talk," said Sherborne.

Richard obeyed, and leaning over the table, asked in a low deep tone, "Where is Mistress Nutter, Nicholas?"

The squire looked towards the door before he answered, and then said —

"I will tell you. After the destruction of Malkin Tower and the band of robbers, she was taken to a solitary hut near Barley Booth, at the foot of Pendle Hill, and the next day was conveyed across Bowland Forest to Poulton in the Fyld, on the borders of Morecambe Bay, with the intention of getting her on board some vessel bound for the Isle of Man. Arrangements were made for this purpose, but when the time came, she refused to go, and was brought secretly back to the hut near Barley, where she has been ever since, though her place of concealment was hidden even from you and her daughter."

"The captain of the robbers, Fogg, or Demdike, escaped — did he not?' said Richard.

"Ay, in the confusion occasioned by the blowing up of the Tower he managed to get away," replied Nicholas, "and we were unable to follow him, as our attentions had to be bestowed upon Mistress Nutter. This was the more unlucky, as through his instrumentality Jem and his mother Elizabeth were liberated from the dungeon in which they were placed at Whalley Abbey, prior to their removal to Lancaster Castle, and none of them have been heard of since."

"And I hope will never be heard of again," cried Richard. "But is Mistress Nutter's retreat secure, think you? — May it not be discovered by some of Nowell's emissaries?"

"I trust not," replied Nicholas, "but her voluntary surrender is more to be apprehended, for when I last saw her, on the night before starting for Myerscough, she told me she was determined to give herself up for trial; and her motives could scarce be combatted, for she declares that unless she submits herself to the justice of man, and expiates her offences, she cannot be saved. She now seems as resolute in good as she was heretofore resolute in evil."

"If she perishes thus, her self-sacrifice, for thus it becomes, will be Alizon's death-blow," cried Richard.

"So I told her," replied Nicholas — "but she continued inflexible. 'I am born to be the cause of misery to others, and most to those I love most,' she said, 'but I cannot fly from justice. There is no escape for me.'"

"She is right," cried Richard; "there is no escape but the grave, whither we are all three hurrying. A terrible fatality attaches to us."

"Nay, say not so, Dick," rejoined Nicholas, "you are young, and though this shock may be severe, yet when it is passed, you will be recompensed, I hope, by many years of happiness."

"I am not to be deceived," said Richard. "Look me in

the face, and say honestly if you think me long lived. You cannot do it. I have been smitten by a mortal illness, and am wasting gradually away. I am dying — I feel it — know it — but though it may abridge my brief term of life, I will purchase present health and spirits, at any cost and save Alizon. Ah!" he exclaimed, putting his hand to his heart, with a fearful expression of anguish.

"What is the matter?" cried the two gentlemen, greatly alarmed, and springing towards him.

But the young man could not reply. Another and another agonising spasm shook his frame, and cold damps broke out upon his pallid brow, showing the intensity of his suffering. Nicholas and Sherborne regarded each other anxiously, as if doubtful how to act.

"Shall I summon assistance?" said the latter, in a low tone.

But, softly as the words were uttered, they reached the ears of Richard. Rousing himself by a great effort, he said,

"On no account — the fit is over. I am glad it has seized me now, for I shall not be liable to a recurrence of it throughout the day. Lead me to the window. The air will presently revive me."

His friends complied with the request, and placed him at the open casement.

Great bustle was observable below, and the cause was soon manifest, as the chief huntsman, clad in green, with buff boots drawn high up on the thigh, a horn about his neck, and mounted on a strong black curtal, rode forth from the stables. He was attended by a noble bloodhound, and on gaining the middle of the court, put his bugle to his lips, and blew a loud blithe call that made the walls ring again. The summons was immediately answered by a number of grooms and pages, leading a multitude of richly-caparisoned horses towards the

upper end of the court, where a gallant troop of dames, nobles, and gentlemen, all attired for the chace, awaited them; and where, amidst much mirth, and bandying of lively jest and compliment, a general mounting took place, the ladies, of course, being placed first on their steeds. While this was going forward, the hounds were brought from the kennel in couples — relays having been sent down to the park more than an hour before — and the yard resounded with their joyous baying, and the neighing of the impatient steeds. By this time also, the chief huntsman had collected his forces, consisting of a dozen prickers, six habited like himself, in green, and six in russet, and all mounted on stout curtals. Those in green were intended to hunt the hart, and those in russet the wild boar, the former being provided with hunting-poles, and the latter with spears. Their girdles were well lined with beef and pudding, and each of them acting upon the advice of worthy Master George Turbervile, had a stone bottle of good wine at the pummel of his saddle. Besides these there were a whole host of varlets of the chace on foot. The chief falconer, with a long-winged hawk in her hood and jesses upon his wrist, was stationed somewhat nearer the gate-way, and close to him were his attendants, each having on his fist a falcon gentle, a Barbary falcon, a merlin, a goshawk, or a sparrow-hawk. Thus all was in readiness, and hound, hawk, and man seemed equally impatient for the sport.

At this juncture, the door was thrown open by Faryngton, who announced Sir John Finett.

"It is time, Master Nicholas Assheton," said the Master of the Ceremonies.

"I am ready to attend you, Sir John," replied Nicholas, taking a parchment from his doublet, and unfolding it, "the petition is well signed."

"So I see, Sir," replied the knight, glancing at it. "Will not your friends come with you?"

"Most assuredly," replied Richard, who had risen on the knight's appearance. And he followed the others down the staircase.

By direction of the Master of the Ceremonies nearly a hundred of the more important gentlemen of the county had been got together, and this train was subsequently swelled to thrice the amount, from the accessions it received from persons of inferior rank when its object became known. At the head of this large assemblage Nicholas was now placed, and accompanied by Sir John Finett, who gave the word to the procession to follow them, he moved slowly up the court. Passing through the brilliant crowd of equestrians the procession halted at a short distance from the door-way of the great hall, and James, who had been waiting for its approach within, now came forth, amid the cheers and plaudits of the spectators.

Sir John Finett then led Nicholas forward, and the latter, dropping on one knee, said —

"May it please your Majesty, I hold in my hand a petition, signed, as if you will deign to cast your eyes over it, you will perceive, by many hundreds of the lower orders of your loving subjects in this your county of Lancaster, representing that they are debarred from lawful recreations upon Sunday, after afternoon service, and upon holidays, and praying that the restrictions imposed in 1579, by the Earls of Derby and Huntingdon, and by William, Bishop of Chester, Commissioners to her late Highness, Elizabeth, of glorious memory, your Majesty's predecessor, may be withdrawn."

And with this, he placed in the King's hands the petition, which was very graciously received.

"The complaint of our loving subjects in Lancashire shall not pass unnoticed, Sir," said James. "Sorry are we to say it, but this county of ours is sair infested wi' folk inclining to Puritanism and Papistry, baith of which sects are adverse to the cause of true religion. Honest mirth is not only tolerable but praiseworthy, and the prohibition of it is likely to breed discontent, and this our enemies ken fu' weel; for when," he continued, loudly and emphatically — "when shall the common people have leave to exercise, if not upon Sundays and holidays, seeing they must labour, and win their living on all other days?"

"Your Majesty speaks like King Solomon himself," observed Nicholas, amid the loud cheering.

"Our will and pleasure then is," pursued James, "that our good people be not deprived of any lawful recreation that shall not tend to a breach of the laws, or a violation of the Kirk; but that after the end of divine service, they shall not be disturbed, letted, or discouraged from any lawful recreation — as dancing and sic like, either of men or women, archery, leaping, vaulting, or ony ither harmless recreation; nor frae the having of May games, Whitsun ales, or morris dancing; nor frae setting up of May poles, and ither sports, therewith used, provided the same be had in due and convenient time, without impediment or neglect of divine service. And our will further is, that women shall have leave to carry rushes to the church, for the decoring of it, according to auld custom. But we prohibit all unlawful games on Sundays, as bear-baiting and bull-baiting, interludes, and, by the common folk — mark ye that, Sir — playing at bowls." *

* This speech is in substance the monarch's actual Declaration concerning Lawful Sports, promulgated in 1618, in a little Tractate, generally known as the "Book of Sports;" by which he would have conferred a great boon on the lower orders, if his kindly purpose had not been

The royal declaration was received with loud and reiterated cheers, amidst which James mounted his steed, a large black docile-looking charger, and rode out of the court, followed by the whole cavalcade.

Trumpets were sounded from the battlements as he passed through the gateway, and shouting crowds attended him all the way down the hill, until he entered the avenue leading to the park.

At the conclusion of the royal address, the procession headed by Nicholas immediately dispersed, and such as meant to join the chace set off in quest of steeds. Foremost amongst these was the squire himself, and on approaching the stables, he was glad to find Richard and Sherborne already mounted, the former holding his horse by the bridle, so that he had nothing to do but vault upon his back. There was an impatience about Richard, very different from his ordinary manner, that surprised and startled him, and the expression of the young man's countenance long afterwards haunted him The face was deathly pale, except that on either cheek burned a red feverish spot, and the eyes blazed with unnatural light. So much was the squire struck by his cousin's looks, that he would have dissuaded him from going forth, but he saw from his manner that the attempt would fail, while a significant gesture from his brother-in-law told him he was equally uneasy.

Scarcely had the principal nobles passed through the gateway, than, in spite of all efforts to detain him, Richard struck spurs into his horse, and dashed amidst the cavalcade, crea-

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misapprehended by some, and ultimately defeated by bigots and fanatics. King James deserves to be remembered with gratitude, if only for this manifestation of sympathy with the enjoyments of the people. He had himself discovered that the restrictions imposed upon them had "set up filthy tiplings and drunkenness, and bred a number of idle and discontented speeches in the ale-houses."

ting great disorder, and rousing the ire of the Earl of Pembroke, to whom the marshalling of the train was entrusted. But Richard paid little heed to his wrath, and perhaps did not hear the angry expressions addressed to him, for no sooner was he outside the gate, than instead of pursuing the road, down which the King was proceeding, and which has been described as hewn out of the rock, he struck into a thicket on the right, and, in defiance of all attempts to stop him, and at the imminent risk of breaking his neck, rode down the precipitous sides of the hill, and reaching the bottom in safety, long before the royal cavalcade had attained the same point, took the direction of the park.

His friends watched him commence this perilous descent in dismay, but though much alarmed, they were unable to follow him.

"Poor lad! I am fearful he has lost his senses," said Sherborne.

"He is what the King would call 'fey,' and not long for this world," replied Nicholas, shaking his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

How King James hunted the hart and the wild boar in Hoghton Park.

GALLOPING on fast and furiously, Richard tracked a narrow path of green sward, lying between the tall trees composing the right line of the avenue and the adjoining wood. Within it grew many fine old thorns, diverting him now and then from his course, but he still held on until he came within a short distance of the chace, when his attention was caught by a very singular figure. It was an old man, clad in a robe of coarse brown serge, with a cowl drawn partly over his head, a rope girdle like that used by a cordelier, sandal shoon,

and a venerable white beard descending to his waist. The features of the hermit, for such he seemed, were majestic and benevolent. Seated on a bank overgrown with wild thyme, beneath the shade of a broad-armed elm, he appeared so intently engaged in the perusal of a large open volume laid on his knee, that he did not notice Richard's approach. Deeply interested, however, by his appearance, the young man determined to address him, and reining in his horse, said, respectfully, "Save you, father!"

"Pass on, my son," replied the old man, without raising his eyes, "and hinder not my studies."

But Richard would not be thus dismissed.

"Perchance you are not aware, father," he said, "that the King is about to hunt within the park this morning. The royal cavalcade has already left Hoghton Tower, and will be here ere many minutes."

"The King and his retinue will pass along the broad avenue, as you should have done, and not through this retired road," replied the hermit. "They will not disturb me."

"I would fain know the subject of your studies, father?" inquired Richard.

"You are inquisitive, young man," returned the hermit, looking up and fixing a pair of keen gray eyes upon him. "But I will satisfy your curiosity, if by so doing I shall rid me of your presence. I am reading the Book of Fate."

Richard uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"And in it your destiny is written," pursued the old man; "and a sad one it is. Consumed by a strange and incurable disease, which may at any moment prove fatal, you are scarcely likely to survive the next three days, in which case she you love better than existence will perish miserably, being adjudged to have destroyed you by witchcraft."

"It must indeed be the Book of Fate that tells you this," cried Richard, springing from his horse, and approaching close to the old man. "May I cast eyes upon it?"

"No, my son," replied the old man, closing the volume. "You would not comprehend the mystic characters — but no eye, except my own, must look upon them. What is written will be fulfilled. Again, I bid you pass on. I must speedily return to my hermit cell in the forest."

"May I attend you thither, father?" asked Richard.

"To what purpose?" rejoined the old man. "You have not many hours of life. Go, then, and pass them in the ferce excitement of the chace. Pull down the lordly stag — slaughter the savage boar, and, as you see the poor denizens of the forest perish, think that your own end is not far off. Hark! Do you hear that boding cry?"

"It is the croak of a raven, newly alighted in the tree above us," replied Richard. "The sagacious bird will ever attend the huntsmen in the chace, in the hope of obtaining a morsel when they break up deer."

"Such is the custom of the bird I wot well," said the old man; "but it is not in joyous expectation of the raven's-bone that he croaks now, but because his fell instinct informs him that the living-dead is beneath him."

And as if in answer to the remark the raven croaked exultingly, and, rising from the tree, wheeled in a circle above them.

"Is there no way of averting my terrible destiny, father?" cried Richard, despairingly.

"Ay, if you choose to adopt it," replied the old man. "When I said your ailment was incurable, I meant by ordinary remedies, but it will yield to such as I alone can employ. The malignant and fatal influence under which you labour may be

removed, and then your instant restoration to health and vigour will follow."

"But how, father — how?" cried Richard, eagerly.

"You have simply to sign your name in this book," rejoined the hermit, "and what you desire shall be done. Here is a pen," he added, taking one from his girdle.

"But the ink?" cried Richard.

"Prick your arm with your dagger, and dip the pen in the blood," replied the old man. "That will suffice."

"And what follows, if I sign?" demanded Richard, staring at him.

"Your instant cure. I will give you to drink of a wondrous elixir."

"But to what do I bind myself?" asked Richard.

"To serve me," replied the hermit, smiling, — "but it is a light service, and only involves your appearance in this wood once a-year. — Are you agreed?"

"I know not," replied the young man, distractedly.

"You must make up your mind speedily," said the hermit; "for I hear the approach of the royal cavalcade."

And as he spoke, the mellow notes of a bugle, followed by the baying of hounds, the jingling of bridles, and the trampling of a large troop of horse, were heard at a short distance down the avenue.

"Tell me who you are?" cried Richard.

"I am the hermit of the wood," replied the old man. "Some people call me Hobthurst, and some by other names, but you will have no difficulty in finding me out. Look yonder!" he added, pointing through the trees.

And glancing in the direction indicated, Richard beheld a small party on horseback advancing across the plain, consisting of his father, his sister and Alizon, with their attendants.

"'T is she! — 't is she!" he cried.

"Can you hesitate, when it is to save *her*?" demanded the old man.

"Heaven help me, or I am lost!" fervently ejaculated Richard, gazing on high while making the appeal.

When he looked down again the old man was gone, and he saw only a large black snake gliding off among the bushes. Muttering a few words of thankfulness for his deliverance, he sprang upon his horse.

"It may be the arch tempter is right," he cried, "and that but few hours of life remain to me, but if so, they shall be employed in endeavours to vindicate Alizon, and defeat the snares by which she is beset."

With this resolve, he struck spurs into his horse, and set off in the direction of the little troop. Before, however, he could come up to them, their progress was arrested by a pursuivant, who, riding in advance of the royal cavalcade, motioned them to stay till it had passed, and the same person also perceiving Richard's purpose, called to him, authoritatively, to keep back. The young man might have disregarded the injunction, but at the same moment the King himself appeared at the head of the avenue, and remarking Richard, who was not more than fifty yards off on the right, instantly recognised him, and shouted out, "Come hither, young man — come hither."

Thus baffled in his design, Richard was forced to comply, and uncovering his head, rode slowly towards the monarch. As he approached, James fixed on him a glance of sharpest scrutiny.

"Odds life! ye ha' been ganging a fine gait, young Sir," he cried. "Ye maun be demented to ride down a hill i' that fashion, and as if your craig war of nae account. It 's weel ye ha' come aff scaithless. Are ye tired o' life — or was it the

muckle deil himsel that drove ye on? Canna ye find an excuse, man? Nay, then, I'll gi'e ye ane. The loadstane will draw nails out of a door, and there be lassies wi' een strang as loadstanes, that drag men to their perdition. Stands the magnet yonder, eh?" he added, glancing towards the little group before them. "Gude faith! the lass maun be a potent witch to exercise sic influence, and we wad fain see the effect she has on you when near. Sir Richard Hoghton," he called out to the knight, who rode a few paces behind him, "we pray you present Sir Richard Assheton and his daughter to us."

Had he dared so to do, Richard would have thrown himself at the King's feet, but all he could venture upon was to say in a low earnest tone, "Do not prejudge Alizon, Sire. On my soul she is innocent."

"The King prejudges nae man," replied James, in a tone of rebuke, "and like the wise prince of Israel, whom it is his wish to resemble, he sees with his ain een, and hears with his ain ears, afore he forms conclusions."

"That is all I can desire, Sire," replied Richard. "Far be it from me to doubt your Majesty's discrimination, or love of justice."

"Ye shall hae proofs of baith, man, afore we ha' done," said James. "Ah! here comes our host, an the twa lassies wi' him. She wi' the lint-white locks is your sister, we guess, and the ither is Alizon — and by our troth, a weel faur'd lass. But Satan is aye delusive. We maun resist his snares."

The party now came on, and were formally presented to the monarch by Sir Richard Hoghton. Sir Richard Assheton, a middle-aged gentleman, with handsome features, though somewhat haughty in expression, and stately deportment, was very graciously received, and James thought fit to pay a few compliments to Dorothy, covertly regarding Alizon the while, yet not neglecting Richard, being ready to intercept any

signal that should pass between them. None, however, was attempted, for the young man felt he should only alarm and embarrass Alizon by any attempt to caution her, and he therefore endeavoured to assume an unconcerned aspect and demeanour.

"We ha' heard the beauty of the Lancashire lassies highly commended," said the King, "but, faith! it passes expectation. Twa lovelier damsels than these we never beheld. Baith are rare specimens o' Nature's handywark."

"Your Majesty is pleased to be complimentary," rejoined Sir Richard Assheton.

"Nae, Sir Richard," returned James. "We are nae gien to flichtering, though aften beflummed oursell. Baith are bonnie lasses, we repeat. An sae this is Alizon Nutter — it wad be Ailsie, in our ain Scottish tongue, to which your Lancashire vernacular closely approximates, Sir Richard. Aweel, fair Alizon," he added, eyeing her narrowly, "ye hae lost your mither, we understand?"

The young girl was not discompesed by this question, but answered in a firm, melancholy tone, — "Your Majesty, I fear, is too well acquainted with my unfortunate mother's history."

"Aweel, we winna deny having heard somewhat to her disadvantage," replied the King — "but your ain looks gae far to contradict the reports, fair maid."

"Place no faith in them then, Sire," replied Alizon, sadly.

"Eh! what! — then you admit your mother's guilt?" cried the King, sharply.

"I neither admit it, nor deny it, Sire," she replied. "It must be for your Majesty to judge her."

"Weel answered," muttered James — "but I must na forget, that the Deil himsel can quote Scripture to serve his

purpose. But you hold in abhorrence the crime laid to your mother's charge — eh?" he added aloud.

"In utter abhorrence," replied Alizon.

"Gude — vera gude," rejoined the King. "But entertaining this feeling, how comes it you screen so heinous an offender frae justice? Nae natural feeling should be allowed to weigh in sic a case."

"Nor should it, Sire, with me," replied Alizon, — "because I believe my poor mother's eternal welfare would be best consulted if she underwent temporal punishment. Neither is she herself anxious to avoid it."

"Then why does she keep out of the way — why does she not surrender herself?" cried the King.

"Because—" and Alizon stopped.

"Because what?" demanded James.

"Pardon me, Sire, I must decline answering further questions on the subject," replied Alizon. "Whatever concerns myself, or my mother alone, I will state freely, but I cannot compromise others."

"Aha! then there are others concerned in it?" cried James. "We thought as much. We will interrogate you further hereafter — but a word mair. We trust ye are devout, and constant in your religious exercises, damsel."

"I will answer for that, Sire," interposed Sir Richard Assheton. "Alizon's whole time is spent in prayer for her unfortunate mother. If there be a fault it is that she goes too far, and injures her health by her zeal."

"A gude fault that, Sir Richard," observed the King, approvingly.

"It beseems me not to speak of myself, Sire," said Alizon, "and I am loth to do so, — but I beseech your Majesty to believe that if my life might be offered as an atonement for my mother, I would freely yield it."

"I' gude faith she staggers me in my opinion," muttered James, "and I maun look into the matter mair closely. The lass is far different frae what I imagined her. But the wiles o' Satan are nae to be comprehended, and he will put on the semblance of righteousness when seeking to beguile the righteous. Aweel, damsel," he added aloud, "ye speak feelingly and properly, and as a daughter should speak, and we respect your feelings, — provided they be sic as ye represent them. And now dispose yourselves for the chace."

"I must pray your Majesty to dismiss me," said Alizon. "It is a sight in which at any time I take small pleasure, and now it is specially distasteful to me. With your permission I will proceed to Hoghton Tower."

"I also crave your Majesty's leave to go with her," said Dorothy.

"I will attend them," interposed Richard.

"Nae, you maun stay wi' us, young Sir," cried the King. "Your gude father win gang wi' 'em. Sir John Finett," he added, calling to the Master of the Ceremonies, and speaking in his ear, "see that they be followed, and that a special watch be kept over Alizon, and also over this youth, — d'ye mark me, — in fact ower a' the Assheton clan. And now," he cried in a loud voice, "let them blaw the strake."

The chief huntsman having placed the bugle to his lips, and blown a strike with two winds, a short consultation was held between him and James, who loved to display his knowledge as a woodsman, and while this was going forward, Nicholas and Sherborne having come up, the squire dismounted, and committing Robin to his brother-in-law, approached the monarch.

"If I may be so bold as to put in a word, my liege," he said, "I can show you where a hart of ten is assuredly harboured. I viewed him as I rode through the park this

morning, and cannot, therefore, be mistaken. His head is high and well palmed, great beamed and in good proportion, well burred, and well pearled. He is stately in height, long, and well fed."

"Did you mark the slot, Sir?" inquired James.

"I did, my liege," replied Nicholas. "And a long slot it was — the toes great, with round short joint bones, large shin bones, and the dew-claws close together. I will uphold him for a great old hart as ever proffered, and one that shall show your Majesty rare sport."

"And we 'll take your word for the matter, Sir," said James — "for ye 're as gude a woodman as any we hae in our dominions. Bring us to him, then."

"Will it please your Majesty to ride towards yon glade," said Nicholas — "and before you reach it, the hart shall be roused."

James assenting to the arrangement, Nicholas sprang upon his steed, and calling to the chief huntsman, they galloped off together, accompanied by the bloodhound, the royal cavalcade following somewhat more slowly in the same direction. A fair sight it was to see that splendid company careering over the plain, their feathered caps and gay mantles glittering in the sun, which shone brightly upon them. The morning was lovely, giving promise that the day, when further advanced, would be intensely hot, but at present it was fresh and delightful, and the whole company, exhilarated by the exercise, and by animated conversation, were in high spirits — and perhaps amongst the huge party, which numbered nearly three hundred persons, one alone was a prey to despair. But though Richard Assheton suffered thus internally, he bore his anguish with Spartan firmness, resolved, if possible, to let no trace of it be visible in his features or deportment; and he so far succeeded in con-

quering himself, that the King, who kept a watchful eye upon him, remarked to Sir John Finett as they rode along, that a singular improvement had taken place in the young man's appearance.

The cavalcade was rapidly approaching the glade at the lower end of the chace, when the lively notes of a horn were heard from the adjoining wood, followed by the deep baying of a bloodhound.

"Aha! they have roused him," cried the King, joyfully placing his own bugle to his lips, and sounding an answer. Upon this the whole company halted in anxious expectation, the hounds baying loudly. The next moment a noble hart burst from the wood, whence he had been driven by the shouts of Nicholas and the chief huntsman, both of whom appeared immediately afterwards.

"By my faith! a great hart as ever was hunted," exclaimed the King. "There boys, there! — to him! to him!"

Dashing after the flying hart, the hounds made the welkin ring with their cries. Many lovely damsels were there, but none thought of the cruelty of the sport — none sympathised with the noble animal they were running to death. The cries of the hounds, now loud and ringing, now deep and doling, accompanied by the whooping of the huntsmen, formed a stirring concert, which found a response in many a gentle bosom. The whole cavalcade was spread widely about, for none were allowed to ride near the King. Over the plain they scoured, fleet as the wind, and the hart seemed making for a fell forming part of the hill near the mansion. But ere he reached it, the relays stationed within a covert burst forth, and turning him aside, he once more dashed fleetly across the broad expanse, as if about to return to his old lair. Now he was seen plunging into some bosky dell, — and after being lost to view for a moment, bounding up the opposite bank,

and stretching across a tract thickly covered with fern. Here he gained upon the hounds, who were lost in the green wilderness, and their cries were hushed for a brief space, — but anon they burst forth anew, and the pack were soon again in full cry, and speeding over the open ground.

At first the cavalcade had kept pretty well together, but on the return the case was very different, and many of the dames, being unable to keep up with the hounds, fell off, and, as a natural consequence, many of the gallants lingered behind too. Thus only the keenest huntsmen held on. Amongst these, and about fifty yards behind the King, were Richard and Nicholas. The squire was right when he predicted that the hart would show them good sport. Plunging into the wood, the hard-pressed beast knocked up another stag, and took possession of his lair, but was speedily roused again by Nicholas and the chief huntsman. Once more he is crossing the wide plain, with hounds and huntsmen after him — once more he is turned by a new relay, but this time he shapes his course towards the woods skirting the Darwen. It is a piteous sight to see him now, his coat black and glistening with sweat, his mouth embost with foam, his eyes dull, big tears coursing down his cheeks, and his noble head carried low. His end seems nigh, for the hounds, though weary too, redouble their energies, and the monarch cheers them on. Again the poor beast erects his head — if he can only reach yon coppice he is safe. Despair nerves him, and, with gigantic bounds, he clears the intervening space, and disappears beneath the branches. Quickly as the hounds come after him, they are at fault.

"He has taken to the soil, Sire," cried Nicholas coming up. "To the river — to the river! You may see by the broken branches he has gone this way."

Forcing his way through the wood, James was soon on

the banks of the Darwen, which here ran deep and slow. The hart was nowhere to be seen, nor was there any slot on the further side to denote that he had gone forth. It was evident, therefore, that he had swam down the stream. At this moment a shout was heard a hundred yards lower down, proceeding from Nicholas, and, riding in the direction of the sound, the King found the hart at bay on the further side of the stream, and nearly up to his haunches in the water. The King regarded him for a moment anxiously. The poor animal was now in his last extremity, but he seemed determined to sell his life dearly. He stood on a bank projecting into the stream, round which the water flowed deeply, and could not be approached without difficulty and danger. He had already gored several hounds, whose bleeding bodies were swept down the current; and, though the others bayed round him, they did not dare to approach him, and could not get behind him, as a high bank arose in his rear.

"Have I your Majesty's permission to despatch him?" asked Nicholas.

"Ay, marry if you can, Sir," replied James. "But 'ware the tynes! — 'ware the tynes! — 'If thou be hurt with hart it brings thee to thy bier,' as the auld ballad hath it, and the adage is true, as we oursels have seen."

Nicholas, however, heeded not the caution, but, drawing his wood-knife, and disencumbering himself of his cloak, he plunged into the stream, and with one or two strokes reached the bank. The hart watched his approach, as if divining his purpose, with a look half menacing, half reproachful, and when he came near, dashed his antlered head at him. Nimbly eluding the blow, which, if it had taken effect, might have proved serious, Nicholas plunged his weapon into the poor brute's throat, who instantly fell with a heavy splash into the water.

"Weel stricken! weel stricken!" shouted James, who had witnessed the performance from the opposite bank. "But how shall we get the carcase here?"

"That is easily done, Sire," replied Nicholas. And taking hold of the horns, he guided the body to a low bank, a little below where the King stood.

As soon as it was dragged ashore by the prickers, James put his bugle to his lips and blew a mort. A pryse was thrice sounded by Nicholas, and soon afterwards the whole company came flocking round the spot, whooping the death-note.

Meanwhile, the hounds had gathered round the fallen hart, and were allowed to wreak their fury on him by tearing his throat, happily after sensibility was gone, while Nicholas, again baring his knife, cut off the right fore foot, and presented it to the King. While this ceremony was performed, the varlets of the kennel having cut down a great heap of green branches, and strewn them on the ground, laid the hart upon them, on his back, and then bore him to an open space in the wood, where he was broken up by the King, who prided himself upon his skill in all matters of woodcraft. While this office was in course of execution a bowl of wine was poured out for the monarch, which he took, adverting, as he did so, to the common superstition, that if a huntsman should break up a deer without drinking, the venison would putrify. Having drained the cup, he caused it to be filled again, and gave it to Nicholas, saying the liquor was needful to him after the drenching he had undergone. James then proceeded with his task, and just before he completed it, he was reminded, by a loud croak above him, that a raven was at hand, and accordingly taking a piece of gristle from the spoon of the brisket, he cast it on the ground, and the bird immediately pounced down upon it and carried it off in his huge beak.

After a brief interval, the seek was again winded, another hart was roused, and after a short but swift chace, pulled down by the hounds, and despatched with his own hand by James. Sir Richard Hoghton then besought the King to follow him, and led the way to a verdant hollow surrounded by trees, in which shady and delicious retreat preparations had been made for a slight sylvan repast. Upon a mossy bank beneath a tree, a cushion was placed for the King, and before it on the sward was laid a cloth spread with many dainties, including

> "Neats' tongues powdered well, and jambons of the hog,
> With sausages and savoury knacks to set men's minds agog."—

cold capons, and pigeon pies. Close at hand was a clear cold spring in which numerous flasks of wine were immersed. A few embers, too, had been lighted, on which carbonadoes of vension were prepared.

No great form or ceremony was observed at the entertainment. Sir John Finett and Sir Thomas Hoghton were in close attendance upon the monarch, and ministered to his wants; but several of the nobles and gentlemen stretched themselves on the sward, and addressed themselves to the viands set before them by the pages. None of the dames dismounted, and few could be prevailed upon to take any refreshment. Besides the flasks of wine, there were two barrels of ale in a small cart, drawn by a mule, both of which were broached. The whole scene was picturesque and pleasing, and well calculated to gratify one so fond of sylvan sports as the monarch for whom it was provided.

In the midst of all this tranquillity and enjoyment an incident occurred which interrupted it as completely as if a thunder-storm had suddenly come on. Just when the mirth was at the highest, and when the flowing cup was at many a lip, a tremendous bellowing, followed by the crashing of

branches, was heard in the adjoining thicket. All started to their feet at the appalling sound, and the King himself turned pale.

"What in Heaven's name can it be, Sir Richard?" he inquired.

"It must be a drove of wild cattle," replied the baronet, trembling.

"Wild cattle!" ejaculated James, in great alarm; "and sae near us. Zounds! we shall be trampled and gored to death by these bulls of Basan. Sir Richard, ye are a fause traitor thus to endanger the safety o' your sovereign, and ye shall answer for it, if harm comes o' it."

"I am unable to account for it, Sire," stammered the frightened baronet. "I gave special directions to the prickers to drive the beasts away."

"Ye should na keep sic deevils i' your park, man," cried the monarch. "Eh! what 's that?"

Amidst all this consternation and confusion the bellowing was redoubled, and the crashing of branches drew nearer and nearer, and Nicholas Assheton rushed forward with the King's horse, saying, "Mount, Sire, mount, and away!"

But James was so much alarmed that his limbs refused to perform their office, and he was unable to put foot in the stirrup. Seeing his condition, Nicholas cried out, "Pardon, my liege, but at a moment of peril like the present, one must not stand on ceremony."

So saying, he took the King round the waist, and placed him on his steed.

At this juncture, a loud cry was heard, and a man in extremity of terror, issued from the wood, and dashed towards the hollow. Close on his heels came the drove of wild cattle, and just as he gained the very verge of the descent, the foremost of the herd overtook him, and lowering his curled head,

caught him on the points of his horns, and threw him forwards to such a distance that he alighted with a heavy crash almost at the King's feet. Satisfied, apparently, with their vengeance, or alarmed by the numerous assemblage, the drove instantly turned tail, and were pursued into the depths of the forest by the prickers.

Having recovered his composure, James bade some of the attendants raise the poor wretch, who was lying groaning upon the ground, evidently so much injured as to be unable to move without assistance. His garb was that of a forester, and his bulk — for he was stoutly and squarely built — had contributed, no doubt, to the severity of the fall. When he was lifted from the ground, Nicholas instantly recognised in his blackened and distorted features those of Christopher Demdike.

"What!" he exclaimed, rushing towards him. "Is it thou, villain?"

The sufferer only replied by a look of intense malignity.

"Eh! what — d'ye ken wha it is?" demanded James. "By my saul! I fear the puir fellow has maist of his banes broken."

"No great matter if they be," replied Nicholas, "and it may save the application of torture in case your Majesty desires to put any question to him. Chance has most strangely thrown into your hands one of the most heinous offenders in the kingdom, who has long escaped justice, but who will at length meet the punishment of his crimes. The villain is Christopher Demdike, son of the foul hag who perished in the flames on the summit of Pendle Hill, and captain of a band of robbers."

"What! is the knave a warlock and a riever?" demanded James, regarding Demdike with abhorrence, mingled with alarm.

"Both, Sire," replied Nicholas, "and an assassin to boot. He is a diabolical villain."

"Let him be taken to Hoghton Tower and kept in some strong and secure place till we have leisure to examine him," said James, — "and see that he be visited by some skilful chirurgeon, for we wad nae hae him dee, and sae rab the woodie."

Demdike, who appeared to be in great agony, now forced himself to speak.

"I can make important disclosures to your Majesty," he said, in hoarse and broken tones, "if you will hear them. I am not the only offender who has escaped from justice," he added, glancing vindictively at Nicholas — "there is another, a notorious witch and murderess, who is still screened from justice. I can reveal her hiding-place."

'Your Majesty will not give heed to such a villain's fabrications?" said Nicholas.

"Are they fabrications, Sir?" rejoined James, somewhat sharply. "We maun hear and judge. The snake, though scotched, will still bite, it seems. We hae hangit a Highland cateran without trial afore this, and we may be tempted to take the law into our ain hands again. Bear the villain hence. See he be disposed of as already directed, and take good care he is strictly guarded. And now gi'e us a cross-bow, Sir Richard Hoghton, and bid the prickers drive the deer afore us, for we wad try our skill as a marksman."

And while Demdike was placed on the litter of green boughs which had recently sustained a nobler burthen in the fallen hart, and in this sort was conveyed to Hoghton Tower, James rode with his retinue towards a long glade, where receiving a cross-bow from the huntsman, he took up a favourable position behind a large oak, and several herds of deer being driven before him, he selected his quarries, and de-

liberately took aim at them, contriving in the course of an hour to bring down four fat bucks, and to maim as many others, which were pulled down by the hounds. And with this slaughter he was content.

Sir Richard Hoghton then informed his Majesty that a huge boar, which, in sporting phrase, had left the sounder five years, had broken into the park the night before, and had been routing amongst the fern. The age and size of the animal were known by the print of the feet, the toes being round and thick, the edge of the hoof worn and blunt, the heel large and the guards, or dew-claws, great and open, from all which appearances, it was adjudged by the baronet to be "a great old boar, not to be refused."

James at once agreed to hunt him, and the hounds being taken away, six couples of magnificent mastiffs, of the Lancashire breed, were brought forward, and the monarch, under the guidance of Sir Richard Hoghton and the chief huntsman, repaired to an adjoining thicket, in which the boar fed and couched.

On arriving near his den, a boar-spear was given to the King, and the prickers advancing into the wood, presently afterwards reared the enormous brute. Sallying forth, and freaming furiously, he was instantly assailed by the mastiffs, but, notwithstanding the number of his assailants, he made light of them, shaking them from his bristly hide, crushing them beneath his horny feet, thrusting at them with his sharpened tusks, and committing terrible devastation among them.

Repeated charges were made upon the savage animal by James, but it was next to impossible to get a blow at him for some time, and when at length the monarch made the attempt, he struck too low, and hit him on the snout, upon which the infuriated boar, finding himself wounded, sprang towards the horse, and ripped him open with his tusks.

The noble charger instantly rolled over on his side, exposing the royal huntsman to the fury of his merciless assailant, whose tusks must have ploughed his flesh, if, at this moment, a young man had not ridden forward, and, at the greatest personal risk, approached the boar, and striking straight downwards, cleft the heart of the fierce brute with his spear.

Meanwhile, the King having been disengaged by the prickers from his wounded steed, which was instantly put out of its agony by the sword of the chief huntsman, looked for his deliverer, and discovering him to be Richard Assheton, was loud in his expressions of gratitude.

"Faith! ye maun claim a boon at our hands," said James. "It maun never be said the King is ungrateful. What can we do for you, lad?"

"For myself, nothing, Sire," replied Richard.

"But for anither meikle — is that what ye wad hae us infer?" cried the King, with a smile. "Aweel, the lassie shall hae strict justice done her; but for your ain sake we maun inquire into the matter. Meantime, wear this," he added, taking a magnificent sapphire ring from his finger, and if you should ever need our aid, send it to us as a token."

Richard took the gift, and knelt to kiss the hand graciously extended to him.

By this time another horse had been provided for the monarch, and the enormous boar, with his feet upwards and tied together, was suspended upon a pole, and borne on the shoulders of four stout varlets as the grand trophy of the chace.

When the royal company issued from the wood a strike of nine was blown by the chief huntsman, and such of the cavalcade as still remained on the field being collected together, the party crossed the chace, and took the direction of Hoghton Tower.

CHAPTER IX.

The banquet.

On the King's return to Hoghton Tower, orders were given by Sir Richard, for the immediate service of the banquet; it being the hospitable baronet's desire that festivities should succeed each other so rapidly as to allow of no tedium.

The *coup d'œil* of the banquet-hall on the monarch's entrance was magnificent. Pannelled with black lustrous oak, and lighted by mullion windows, filled with stained glass, and emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the family, the vast and lofty hall was hung with banners, and decorated with panoplies and trophies of the chace. Three long tables ran down it, each containing a hundred covers. At the lower end were stationed the heralds, the pursuivants, and a band of yeomen of the guard, with the royal badge, a demi-rose crowned, impaled with a demi-thistle, woven in gold on their doublets, and having fringed pole-axes over their shoulders. Behind them was a richly-carved oak screen, concealing the passages leading to the buttery and kitchens, in which the clerk of the kitchen, the pantlers, and the yeomen of the cellar and ewery, were hurrying to and fro. Above the screen was a gallery, occupied by the trumpeters and minstrels; and over all was a noble rafter-roof. The tables were profusely spread, and glittered with silver dishes of extraordinary size and splendour, as well as with flagons and goblets of the same material and rare design. The guests, all of whom were assembled, were out-numbered by the prodigious array of serving men, pages, and yeomen waiters in the yellow and red liveries of the Stuart.

Flourishes of trumpets announced the coming of the monarch, who was preceded by Sir Richard Hoghton, bear-

ing a white wand, and ushered with much ceremony to his place. At the upper end of the hall was a raised floor, and on either side of it an oriel window, glowing with painted glass. On this dais, the King's table was placed, underneath a canopy of state, embroidered with the royal arms, and bearing James's kindly motto, "*Beati Pacifici.*" Seats were reserved at it for the Dukes of Buckingham and Richmond, the Earls of Pembroke and Nottingham, the Lords Howard of Effingham and Grey of Groby, Sir Gilbert Hoghton, and the Bishop of Chester. These constituted the favoured guests. Grace having been said by the bishop, the whole company took their seats, and the general stillness hitherto prevailing throughout the vast hall was broken instantaneously by the clatter of trenchers.

A famous feast it was, and worthy of commemoration. Masters Morris and Miller, the two cooks who contrived it, as well as the labourers for the ranges, for the pastries, for the boiled meats, and for the pullets, performed their respective parts to admiration. The result was all that could be desired. The fare was solid and substantial, consisting of dishes which could be cut and come to again. Amongst the roast meats were chines of beef, haunches of venison, giggets of mutton, fatted geese, capons, turkies, and sucking pigs; amongst the boiled, pullets, lamb, and veal; but baked meats chiefly abounded, and amongst them were to be found red-deer pasty, hare-pie, gammon-of-bacon pie, and baked wild boar. With the salads, which were nothing more than what would now-a-days be termed "vegetables," were mixed all kinds of soused fish, arranged according to the sewer's directions — "the salads spread about the tables, the fricassees mixed with them, the boiled meats among the fricassees, roast meats amongst the boiled, baked meats amongst the roast, and carbonados amongst the baked." This was the first

course merely. In the second were all kinds of game and wild fowl, roast herons three in a dish, bitterns, cranes, bustards, curlews, dotterels, and pewits. Besides these there were lumbar pies, marrow pies, quince pies, artichoke pies, florentines, and innumerable other good things. Some dishes were specially reserved for the King's table, as a baked swan, a roast peacock, and the jowl of a sturgeon soused. These and a piece of roast beef formed the principal dishes.

The attendants at the royal table comprised of such gentlemen as wore Sir Richard Assheton's liveries, and amongst these, as a matter of course, were Nicholas Assheton and Sherborne. On seeing the former, the King immediately inquired about his deliverer, and on hearing he was at the lower tables, desired he might be sent for, and as Richard soon afterwards appeared, having on his return from the chace changed his sombre apparel for gayer attire, James smiled graciously upon him, and more than once, as a mark of special favour, took the wine cup from his hands.

The King did ample justice to the good things before him, and especially to the beef, which he found so excellent, that the carver had to help him for the second time. Rir Richard Hoghton ventured to express his gratification that his Majesty found the meat good—"Indeed, it is generally admitted," he said, "that our Lancashire beef is well fed, and well flavoured."

"Weel flavoured," exclaimed James, as he swallowed the last juicy morsel, "it is delicious. Finer beef nae man ever pit teeth into, and I only wish a' my loving subjects had as gude a dinner as I hae this day eaten. What joint do ye ca' it, Sir Richard?" he asked, with eyes evidently twinkling with a premeditated jest.

"This dish," replied the host, somewhat surprised—"this, Sire, is a loin of beef."

"A loin!" exclaimed James, taking the carving-knife from the sewer, who stood by, "by my faith that is not title honourable enough for joint sae worthy. It wants a dignity, and it shall hae it. Henceforth," he added, touching the meat with the flat of the long blade, as if placing the sword on the back of a knight expectant, "henceforth, it shall be Sir-Loin, and see ye ca' it sae. Give me a cup of wine, Master Richard Assheton."

All the nobles at the table laughed loudly at the monarch's jest, and as it was soon passed down to those at the lower table, the hall resounded with laughter, in which page and attendant of every degree joined, to the great satisfactien of the good-natured originator of the merriment.*

"My dear dad and gossip appears in unwonted good spirits to-day," observed the Duke of Buckingham.

"And wi' gude reason, Steenie," replied the King, "for we dinna mind when we hae had better sport — always excepting the boar hunt when we should ha been rippit up by the cursed creature's tusks but for this braw laddie," he added, pointing to Richard. "Ye maun see what can be done for him, Steenie. We maun hae him at court."

"Your Majesty's wishes have only to be expressed, to be fulfilled," replied Buckingham, somewhat drily.

"Were I the lad I wadna place ower meikle dependence on the Duke's promises," remarked Archie Armstrong, in a low tone, to Nicholas.

* "There is a laughable tradition," says Nichols, "still generally current in Lancashire that our knight-making monarch knighted at the banquet, in Hoghton Tower, a loin of beef, the part ever since called the sir-loin." And it is added by the same authority, "if the King did not give the sir-loin its name, he might, notwithstanding, have indulged in a pun on the already coined word, the etymology of which was then, as now, as little regarded as the thing signified is well approved." — *Nichols's Progresses of James I.*, vol. iii.

"Has your Majesty made any further inquiries about the girl suspected of witchcraft?" inquired Buckingham, renewing the conversation.

"Whist, Steenie, whist!" cried James, "Did na ye see her yourself this morning?" he added, in a low tone. "Ah! I recollect ye were nae at the chace. A weel, I hae conferred wi' her, and am sair perplexed i' the matter. She is a weel faur'd lassie, as ony i' the realm, and answers decorously and doucely. Sooth to say, her looks and manner are mightily in her favour."

"Then you mean to dismiss the matter without further investigation?" observed Buckingham. "I always thought your Majesty delighted to exercise your sagacity in detecting the illusions practised by Satan and his worshippers."

"And sae we do," replied James. "But bend your bonnie head this way till we whisper in your ear. We hae a device for finding it a' out, which canna fail; and when you ken it you will applaud your dear dad's wisdom, and parfit mastery o' the haill science o' kingcraft."

"I would your Majesty would make me acquainted with this notable scheme," replied Buckingham, with ill-concealed contempt. "I might make it more certain of success."

"Nae — nae — we shall nae let the cat out of the bag just yet," returned the King. "We mean it as a surprise to ye a'."

"Then whatever be the result, it is certain to answer the effect intended," observed the Duke.

"Gae wa'! ye are ever sceptical, Steenie, — ever misdooting your ain dear dad and gossip," rejoined James; "but ye shall find we hae nae airned the title of the British Solomou for naething."

Soon after this the King arose, and was ushered to his apartments by Sir Richard Hoghton with the same ceremony

as had been observed on his entrance. He was followed by all the nobles, and Nicholas and the others, being released from their duties, repaired to the lower end of the hall to dine. The revel was now sufficiently boisterous, for as the dames had departed at the same time as the monarch, all restraint was cast aside. The wine-cup flowed freely, and the rafters rang with laughter. Under ordinary circumstances Richard would have shrunk from such a scene, but he had now a part to play, and therefore essayed to laugh at each jest, and to appear as reckless as his neighbours. He was glad, however, when the signal for general dispersion was given, for though Sir Richard Hoghton was unwilling to stint his guests, he was fearful, if they sat too long over their wine, some disturbances might ensue; and indeed, when the revellers came forth and dispersed within the base-court, their flushed cheeks, loud voices, and unsteady gait, showed that their potations had already been deep enough.

Meanwhile, quite as much mirth was taking place out of doors as had occurred within the banquetting-hall. As soon as the King sat down to dinner, according to promise the gates were thrown open, and the crowd outside admitted. The huge roast was then taken down, carved, and distributed among them; the only difficulty experienced being in regard to trenchers, and various and extraordinary were the contrivances resorted to to supply the deficiency. This circumstance however, served to heighten the fun, and as several casks of stout ale were broached at the same time, universal hilarity prevailed. Still, in the midst of so vast a concourse, many component parts of which had now began to experience the effects of the potent liquor, some little manifestation of disorder might naturally be expected; but all such was speedily quelled by the yeomen of the guard, and other

officials appointed for the purpose, and amidst the uproar and confusion, harmony generally prevailed.

While elbowing his way through the crowd, Nicholas felt his sleeve plucked, and turning, perceived Nance Redferne, who signed him to follow her, and there was something in her manner that left him no alternative but compliance. Nance passed on rapidly, and entered the doorway of a building, where it might be supposed they would be free from interruption.

"What do you want with me, Nance?" asked the squire, somewhat impatiently. "I must beg to observe that I cannot be troubled further on your account, and am greatly afraid aspersions may be thrown on my character if I am seen talking with you."

"A few words wi' me winna injure your character, squire," rejoined Nance, "an it 's on your account an naw on my own that ey ha' brought you here. Ey ha important information to gie ye. What win yo say when ey tell yo that Jem Device, Elizabeth Device, an' her dowter Jennet are here — aw breedin mischief agen yo, Ruchot Assheton, and Alizon."

"The devil!" ejaculated Nicholas.

"Eigh, yo 'n find it the devil, ey con promise ye, onless their plans be frustrated," said Nance.

"That can be easily done," replied Nicholas. "I 'll cause them to be arrested at once."

"Nah, nah — that canna be," rejoined Nance — "Yo mun bide your time."

"What! and allow such miscreants to go at large, and work any malice they please against me and my friends," replied Nicholas. "Show me where they are Nance, or I must make you a prisoner."

"Nah! yo winna do that, squire," she replied, in a tone of good-humoured defiance. "Ye winna do it, for two good

reasons: first, becose yo 'd be harming a freend who wants to sarve yo, and *win* do so, if yo 'n let her; and secondly, becose if yo wur to raise a finger agen me, ey 'd deprive yo of speech an motion. When the reet moment comes yo shan strike — boh it 's nah come yet. The fruit is nah ripe eneugh to gather. Ey am os anxious os you con be, that the whole o' the Demdike brood should be swept away — an it shan be, if yo 'n leave it to me."

"Well, I commit the matter entirely to you," said Nicholas. "Apparently, it cannot be in better hands. But are you aware that Christopher Demdike is a prisoner here in Hoghton Tower? He was taken this morning in the park."

"Ey knoa it," replied Nance; "an ey knoa also why he went there, an it wur my intention to ha' revealed his black design to yo. However, it has bin ordert differently. Boh in respect to t' others, wait till I gie yo the signal. They are disguised; boh even if ye see 'em, an recognise 'em, dunna let it appear till ey gie the word, or yo 'n spoil aw."

"Your injunctions shall be obeyed implicitly, Nance," rejoined Nicholas. "I have now perfect reliance upon you. But when shall I see you again?"

"That depends upon circumstances," she replied. "To-neet, may be — may be to-morrow neet. My plans mun be guided by those of others. Boh when next yo see me you win ha' to act."

And without waiting an answer, she rushed out of the doorway, and mingling with the crowd was instantly lost to view; while Nicholas, full of the intelligence he had received, betook himself slowly to his lodgings.

Scarcely were they gone when a door, which had been standing ajar, near them, was opened wide, and disclosed the keen visage of Master Potts.

"Here 's a pretty plot hatching — here 's a nice discovery

I have made," soliloquised the attorney. "The whole Demdike family, with the exception of the old witch herself, whom I saw burnt on Pendle Hill, are at Hoghton Tower. This shall be made known to the King. I 'll have Nicholas Assheton arrested at once, and the woman with him, whom I recognise as Nance Redferne. It will be a wonderful stroke, and will raise me highly in his Majesty's estimation. Yet stay! Will not this interfere with my other plans with Jennet? Let me reflect. I must go cautiously to work. Besides, if I cause Nicholas to be arrested Nance will escape, and then I shall have no clue to the others. No — no — I must watch Nicholas closely, and take upon myself all the credit of the discovery. Perhaps through Jennet I may be able to detect their disguises. At all events, I will keep a sharp look out. Affairs are now drawing to a close, and I have only, like a wary and experienced fowler, to lay my nets cleverly to catch the whole covey."

And with these ruminations, he likewise went forth into the base-court.

The rest of the day was one round of festivity and enjoyment, in which all classes participated. There were trials of skill and strength, running, wrestling, and cudgelling-matches, with an infinite variety of country games and shows.

Towards five o'clock a rush-cart, decked with flowers and ribbons, and bestridden by men bearing garlands, was drawn up in front of the central building of the tower, in an open window of which sat James — a well-pleased spectator of the different pastimes going forward — and several lively dances were executed by a troop of male and female morris-dancers, accompanied by a tabor and pipe. But though this show was sufficiently attractive, it lacked the spirit of that performed at Whalley, while the character of Maid Marian, which then found so charming a representative in Alizon, was now personated by

a man — and if Nicholas Assheton, who was amongst the by-standers, was not deceived, that man was Jem Device. Enraged by this discovery, the squire was about to seize the ruffian, but calling to mind Nance's counsel, he refrained, and Jem (if it indeed were he) retired with a largess, bestowed by the royal hand as a reward for his uncouth gambols.

The rush-cart and morris-dancers having disappeared, another drollery was exhibited called the "Fool and his Five Sons," the names of the hopeful offspring of the sapient sire being Pickle Herring, Blue Hose, Pepper Hose, Ginger Hose, and Jack Allspice. The humour of this piece, though not particularly refined, seemed to be appreciated by the audience generally, as well as by the monarch, who laughed heartily at its coarse buffoonery.

Next followed "The Plough and Sword Dance;" the principal actors being a number of grotesque figures armed with swords, some of whom were yoked to a plough, on which sat a piper, playing lustily while dragged along. The plough was guided by a man clothed in a bear-skin, with a fur cap on his head, and a long tail, like that of a lion, dangling behind him. In this hirsute personage, who was intended to represent the wood-demon, Hobthurst, Nicholas again detected Jem Device, and again was strongly tempted to disobey Nance's injunctions, and denounce him, — the rather that he recognised in an attendant female, in a fantastic dress, the ruffian's mother, Elizabeth — but he once more desisted.

As soon as the mummers arrived in front of the King the dance began. With their swords held upright, the party took hands and wheeled rapidly round the plough, keeping time to a merry measure played by the piper, who still maintained his seat. Suddenly, the ring was enlarged to double its former size, each man extending his sword to his neighbour, who took

hold of the point; after which a hexagonal figure was formed, all the blades being brought together. The swords were then quickly withdrawn, flashing like sunbeams, and a four square figure was presented, the dancers vaulting actively over each other's heads. Other variations succeeded, not necessary to be specified, and the sport concluded by a general clashing of swords, intended to represent a mêlée.

Meanwhile, Nicholas had been joined by Richard Asshe-ton, and the latter was not long in detecting the two Devices through their disguises. On making this discovery he mentioned it to the squire, and was surprised to find him already aware of the circumstance, and not less astonished when he was advised to let them alone; the squire adding he was unable at that time to give his reasons for such counsel, but being good and conclusive, Richard would be satisfied of their propriety hereafter. The young man, however, thought otherwise, and notwithstanding his relative's attempts to dissuade him, announced his intention of causing the parties to be arrested at once, and with this design he went in search of an officer of the guard that the capture might be effected without disturbance. But the throng was so close round the dancers that he could not pierce it, and being compelled to return and take another course, he got nearer to the mazy ring, and was unceremoniously pushed aside by the mummers. At this moment, both his arms were forcibly grasped, and a deep voice on the right whispered in his ear — "Meddle not with us, and we will not meddle with you," while similar counsel was given him in other equally menacing tones, though in a different key, on the left. Richard would have shaken off his assailants, and seized them in his turn, but power to do so was wanting to him. For the moment he was deprived of speech and motion, but while thus situated he felt that the sapphire ring given him by the King was snatched from his finger by the first speaker,

whom he knew to be Jem Device, while a fearful spell was muttered over him by Elizabeth.

As this occurred at the time when the rattling of the swords engaged the whole attention of the spectators, no one noticed what was going forward, except Nicholas, and before he could get up to the young man, the two miscreants were gone, nor could any one tell what had become of them.

"Have the wretches done you a mischief?" asked the squire, in a low tone, of Richard.

"They have stolen the King's ring, which I meant to use in Alizon's behalf," replied the young man, who by this time had recovered his speech.

"That is unlucky, indeed," said Nicholas. "But we can defeat any ill design they may intend, by acquainting Sir John Finett with the circumstance."

"Let them be," said a voice in his ear. "The time is not yet come."

The squire did not look round, for he well knew that the caution proceeded from Nance Redferne.

And accordingly, he observed to Richard—"Tarry awhile, and you will be amply avenged."

And with this assurance the young man was fain to be content.

Just then a trumpet was sounded, and a herald stationed on the summit of the broad flight of steps leading to the great hall, proclaimed in a loud voice that a tilting-match was about to take place between Archie Armstrong, jester to his most gracious Majesty, and Davy Droman, who filled the same honourable office to his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, and that a pair of gilt-heel'd chopines would be the reward of the successful combatant. This announcement was received with cheers, and preparations were instantly made for the mock tourney. A large circle being formed by the yeomen of the

guard, with an alley leading to it on either side, the two combatants, mounted on gaudily-caparisoned hobby-horses, rode into the ring. Both were armed to the teeth, each having a dish-cover braced around him in lieu of a breast-plate, a newly-scoured brass porringer on his head, a large pewter platter instead of a buckler, and a spit with a bung at the point to prevent mischief, in place of a lance. The Duke's jester was an obese little fellow, and his appearance in this warlike gear was so eminently ridiculous, that it provoked roars of laughter, while Archie was scarcely less ridiculous. After curvetting round the arena in imitation of knights of chivalry, and performing "their careers, their prankers, their false trots, their smooth ambles, and Canterbury paces," the two champions took up a position opposite each other, with difficulty, as it seemed, reining in their pawing chargers, and awaiting the signal of attack to be given by Sir John Finett, the judge of the tournament. This was not long delayed, and the "laissez aller," being pronounced, the preux chevaliers started forward with so much fury, and so little discretion, that meeting half way with a tremendous shock and butting against each other like two rams, both were thrown violently backwards, exhibiting, amid the shouts of the spectators, their heels, no longer hidden by the trappings of their steeds, kicking in the air. Encumbered as they were, some little time elapsed before they could regain their feet, and their lances having been removed in the mean time, by order of Sir John Finett, as being weapons of too dangerous a description for such truculent combatants, they attacked each other with their broad lathen daggers, dealing sounding blows upon helm, habergeon, and shield, but doing little personal mischief. The strife raged furiously for some time, and as the champions appeared pretty well matched, it was not easy to say how it would terminate, when chance seemed to decide in favour of Davy Droman, for in

dealing a heavier blow than usual Archie's dagger snapped in twain, leaving him at the mercy of his opponent. On this the doughty Davy, crowing lustily like Chanticleer, called upon him to yield; but Archie was so wroth at his misadventure, that instead of complying, he sprang forward, and with the hilt of his broken weapon dealt his elated opponent a severe blow on the side of the head, not only knocking off the porringer, but stretching him on the ground beside it. The punishment he had received was enough for poor Davy. He made no attempt to rise, and Archie, crowing in his turn, trampling upon the body of his prostrate foe, and then capering joyously round it, was declared the victor, and received the gilt chopines from the judge, amidst the laughter and acclamations of the beholders.

With this, the public sports concluded. And as evening was drawing on apace, such of the guests as were not invited to pass the night within the Tower, took their departure; while shortly afterwards supper being served in the banqueting-hall, on a scale of profusion and magnificence quite equal to the earlier repast, the King and the whole of his train sat down to it.

CHAPTER X.

Evening entertainments.

OTHER amusements were reserved for the evening. While revelry was again held in the great hall; while the tables groaned, for the third time since morning, with good cheer, and the ruby wine, which seemed to gush from inexhaustible fountains, mantled in the silver flagons; while seneschal, sewer, and pantler, with the yeomen of the buttery and kitchen, were again actively engaged in their vocations; while of the three hundred guests more than half, as if insatiate, again vied with

each other in prowess with the trencher and the goblet; — while in the words of old Taylor, the Water Poet, but who was no water-drinker, and who thus sang of the hospitality of the men of Manchester, in the early part of the seventeenth century — they had

> "Roast, boil'd, bak'd, too, too much, white, claret, sack.
> Nothing they thought too heavy or too hot,
> Can followed can, and pot succeeded pot,"

— during this time preparations were making for fresh entertainments out of doors.

The gardens at Hoghton Tower, though necessarily confined in space, owing to their situation on the brow of a hill, were beautifully laid out, and commanded from their balustred terraces magnificent views of the surrounding country. Below them lay the well-wooded park, skirted by the silvery Darwen, with the fair village of Walton-le-Dale immediately beyond it, the proud town of Preston further on, and the single-coned Nese Point rising majestically in the distance. The principal garden constituted a square, and was divided with mathematical precision, according to the formal taste of the time, into smaller squares, with a broad well-kept gravel walk at each angle. These plots were arranged in various figures and devices — such as the cinq-foil, the flower-de-luce, the trefoil, the lozenge, the fret, the diamond, the cross-bow, and the oval, — all very elaborate and intricate in design. Besides these knots, as they were termed, there were labyrinths, and clipped yew-tree walks, and that indispensable requisite to a garden at the period, a maze. In the centre was a grassy eminence, surmounted by a pavilion; in front of which spread a grass-plot, of smoothest turf, ordinarily used as a bowling-green. At the lower end of this a temporary stage was erected, for the masque about to be represented before the King. Torches were kindled, and numerous lamps burned

in the branches of the adjoining trees; but they were scarcely needed, for the moon being at the full, the glorious effulgence shed by her upon the scene rendered all other light pale and ineffectual.

After supper, at which the drinking was deeper than at dinner, the whole of the revellers repaired to the garden, full of frolic and merriment, and well-disposed for any diversion in store for them. The King was conducted to the bowling-green by his host, preceded by a crowd of attendants bearing odoriferous torches, but the royal gait being somewhat unsteady, the aid of Sir Gilbert Hoghton's arm was required to keep the Monarch from stumbling. The rest of the Bacchanalians followed, and, elated as they were, it will not be wondered that they put very little restraint upon themselves, but shouted, sang, danced, and indulged in all kinds of licence.

Opposite the stage prepared for the masquers a platform had been reared, in front of which was a chair for the King, with seats for the nobles and principal guests behind it. The sides were hung with curtains of crimson velvet fringed with gold; the roof decorated like a canopy; so that it had a very magnificent effect. James lolled back in his chair, and jested loudly and rather indecorously with the various personages as they took their places around him. In less than five minutes the whole of the green was filled with the revellers, and great was the pushing and jostling, the laughing and screaming, that ensued among them. Silence was then enjoined by Sir John Finett, who had stationed himself on the steps of the stage, and at this command the assemblage became comparatively quiet, though now and then a half-suppressed titter or a smothered scream would break out. Amid this silence, the King's voice could be distinctly heard, and his coarse jests reached the ears of all the astonished audience, provoking

many a severe comment from the elders, and much secret laughter from the juniors.

The masque began. Two tutelar deities appeared on the stage. They were followed by a band of foresters clad in Lincoln green, with bows at their backs. The first deity wore a white linen tunic, with flesh-coloured hose and red buskins, and had a purple taffeta mantle over his shoulders. In his hand he held a palm branch, and a garland of the same leaves was woven round his brow. The second household god was a big brawny varlet, wild and shaggy in appearance, being clothed in the skins of beasts, with sandals of untanned cow-hide. On his head was a garland of oak leaves; and from his neck hung a horn. He was armed with a hunting-spear and wood-knife, and attended by a large Lancashire mastiff. Advancing to the front of the stage, the foremost personage thus addressed the Monarch —

"This day, great King for government admired!
Which these thy subjects have so much desired,
Shall be kept holy in their heart's best treasure,
And vow'd to JAMES as is this month to Cæsar.
And now the landlord of this ancient Tower,
Thrice fortunate to see this happy hour,
Whose trembling heart thy presence sets on fire,
Unto this house — the heart of all our shire —
Does bid thee cordial welcome, and would speak it,
In higher notes, but extreme joy doth break it.
He makes his guest most welcome, in his eyes
Love tears do sit, not he that shouts and cries.
And we the antique guardians of this place, —
I of this house — he of the fruitful chace, —
Since the bold Hoghtons from this hill took name,
Who with the stiff, unbridled Saxons came,
And so have flourished in this fairer clime
Successively from that to this our time,
Still offering up to our immortal powers
Sweet incense, wine, and odoriferous flowers;
While sacred Vesta, in her virgin tire,
With vows and wishes tends the hallowed fire.

Now seeing that thy Majesty is thus
Greater than household deities like us,
We render up to thy more powerful guard,
This Tower. This knight is thine — he is thy ward.
For by thy helping and auspicious hand,
He and his home shall ever, ever stand
And flourish, in despite of envious fate;
And then live, like Augustus, fortunate.
And long, long mayst thou live! — To which both men,
And guardian angels cry — "Amen! amen!"

James, who had demeaned himself critically during the delivery of the address, observed at its close to Sir Richard Hoghton, who was standing immediately behind his chair, "We cannot say meikle for the rhymes, which are but indifferently strung together, but the sentiments are leal and gude, and that is a' we care for."

On this, the second tutelar divinity advanced, and throwing himself into an attitude, as if bewildered by the august presence in which he stood, exclaimed —

"Thou greatest of mortals!"

And then stopped, as if utterly confounded.

The King looked at him for a moment, and then roared out — "Weel, gude man, your commencement is pertinent and true enough, and though we be 'the greatest of mortals,' as ye style us, dinna fash yourself about our grandeur, but go on, as if we were nae better nor wiser than your ain simple sell."

But instead of encouraging the dumb-founded deity, this speech completely upset him. He hastily retreated; and in trying to screen himself behind the huntsmen fell back from the stage, and his hound leapt after him. The incident, whether premeditated or not, amused the spectators much more than any speech he could have delivered, and the King joined heartily in the merriment.

Silence being again restored, the first divinity came forward once more, and spoke thus: —

"Dread lord! thy Majesty hath stricken dumb,
His weaker god-head; if to himself he come,
Unto thy service straight he will commend
These foresters, and charge them to attend
Thy pleasure in this park, and show such sport
To the chief huntsman and thy princely court,
As the small circle of this round affords,
And be more ready than he was in words."*

"Weel spoken, and to the purpose, gude fellow," cried James. "And we take this opportuning of assuring our worthy host, in the presence of his other guests, that we have never had better sport in park or forest than we have this day enjoyed — have never eaten better cheer, nor quaffed better wine than at his board — and altogether, have never been more hospitably welcomed."

Sir Richard was overwhelmed by his Majesty's commendation.

"I have done nothing my gracious liege," he said, "to merit such acknowledgment on your part, and the delight I experience is only tempered by my utter unworthiness."

"Hout-tout! man," replied James, jocularly, "ye merit a vast deal mair than we hae said to you. But gude folk dinna always get their deserts. Ye ken that, Sir Richard. And now, ha'e ye not some ither drolleries in store for us?"

The baronet replied in the affirmative, and soon afterwards the stage was occupied by a new class of performers, and a drollery commenced, which kept the audience in one continual roar of laughter so long as it lasted. And yet none

* These speeches, given by *Nichols* as derived from the family records of Sir Henry Philip Hoghton, Bart., were actually delivered at a masque represented on the occasion of King James's visit to Hoghton Tower.

of the parts had been studied, the actors entirely trusting to their own powers of comedy to carry it out. The principal character was the Cap Justice, enacted by Sir John Finett, who took occasion in the course of the performance to lampoon and satirise most of the eminent legal characters of the day, mimicking the voices and manner of the three justices — Crooke, Hoghton, and Doddridge — so admirably that his hearers were well-nigh convulsed, and the three learned gentlemen, who sat near the King, though fully conscious of the ridicule applied to them, were obliged to laugh with the rest. But the unsparing satirist was not content with this, but went on, with most of the other attendants upon ~~the~~ King, and being intimately versed in Court scandal, he directed his lash with telling effect. As a contrast to the malicious pleasantry of the Cap Justice, were the gambols and jests of Robin Goodfellow — a merry imp, who, if he led people into mischief, was always ready to get them out of it. Then there was a dance by Bill Huckler, old Crambo, and Tom o' Bedlam, the half-crazed individual already mentioned, as being among the crowd in the base-court. This was applauded to the echo, and consequently repeated. But the most diverting scene of all was that in which Jem Tospot and the three Doll Wangos appeared. Though given in the broadest vernacular of the county, and scarcely intelligible to the whole of the company, the dialogue of this part of the piece was so life-like and natural, that every one recognised its truth, while the situations arranged with the slightest effort, and on the spur of the moment, were extremely ludicrous. The scene was supposed to take place in a small Lancashire ale-house, where a jovial pedlar was carousing, and where being visited by his three sweethearts, — each of whom he privately declared to be the favourite — he had to reconcile their differences, and keep them all in good humour. Familiar with the character in all

its aspects, Nicholas played it to the life; and to do them justice, Dames Baldwyn, Tetlow, and Nance Redferne, were but little, if at all inferior to him. There was a reality in their jealous quarrelling that gave infinite zest to the performance.

"Saul o' my body!" exclaimed James, admiringly, "those are three braw women. Ane of them maun be sax feet, if she is an inch, and weel made and weel favourt too. Zounds! Sir Richard, there's nae standing the spells o' your Lancashire Witches. High-born and low-born, they are a' alike. I wad their only witchcraft lay in their een. I should then hae the less fear of 'em. But have ye aught more? for it is growing late, and ye ken we hae something to de in that pavilion."

"Only a merry dance, my liege, in which a man will appear in a dendrological foliage of fronds," replied the baronet.

James laughed at the description, and soon afterwards, a party of mummers, male and female, clad in various grotesque garbs, appeared on the stage. In the midst of them was the "dendrological man," enclosed in a framework of green boughs, like that borne by a modern Jack-in-the-green. A ring was formed by the mummers, and the round commenced to lively music.

While the mazy measure was proceeding, Nance Redferne, who had quitted the stage with Nicholas, and now stood close to him among the spectators, said, in a low tone, "Look there!"

The squire glanced in the direction indicated, and to his surprise and terror, distinguished among the crowd at a little distance, the figure of a Cistertian monk.

"He is invisible to every eye except our own," whispered Nance, "and is come to tell me it is time."

"Time for what?" demanded Nicholas.

"Time for you to seize those two accursed Devices, Jem and his mother," replied Nance. "They are both on yon

boards. Jem is the man in the tree, and Elizabeth is the owd crone in the red kirtle and high-crowned hat. Yo win knoa her feaw feace when yo pluck off her mask."

"The monk is gone," cried Nicholas, "I have kept my eyes steadily fixed on him, and he has melted into air. What has he to do with the Devices?"

"He is their fate," returned Nance, "an ey ha' acted under his orders. Boh mount, an seize them. Ey win ge wi' ye."

Forcing his way through the crowd, Nicholas ran up the steps, and followed by Nance, sprang upon the stage. His appearance occasioned considerable surprise, but as he was recognised by the spectators as the jolly Jem Tospot, who had so recently diverted them, and his companion as one of the three Doll Wangos, in anticipation of some more fun, they received him with a round of applause. But without stopping to acknowledge it, or being for a moment diverted from his purpose, Nicholas seized the old crone, and consigning her to Nance, caught hold of the leafy frame in which the man was encased, and pulled him from under it. But he began to think he had unkennelled the wrong fox, for the man, though a tall fellow, bore no resemblance to Jem Device; while when the crone's mask was plucked off, she was found to be a comely young woman. Meanwhile, all around was in an uproar, and amidst a hurricane of hisses, yells, and other indications of displeasure from the spectators, several of the mummers demanded the meaning of such a strange and unwarrantable proceeding.

"They are a couple of witches," cried Nicholas; "this is Jem Device and his mother Elizabeth."

"My name is nother Jem nor Device," cried the man.

"Nor mine, Elizabeth," screamed the woman.

"We know the Devices," cried two or three voices, "and these are none of 'em."

Nicholas was perplexed. The storm increased; Threats accompanied the hisses; when luckily he espied a ring on the man's finger. He instantly seized his hand, and held it up to the general gaze.

"A proof! — a proof," he cried. "This sapphire ring was given by the King to my cousin, Richard Assheton, this morning, and stolen from him by Jem Device."

"Examine their features again," said Nance Redferne, waving her hands over them. "Yo win aw knoa them now."

The woman's face instantly altered. Many years being added to it in a breath. The man changed equally. The utmost astonishment was evinced by all at the transformation, and the bystanders who had spoken before, now cried out loudly — "We know them perfectly now. They are the two Devices."

By this time an officer, attended by a party of halberdiers, had mounted the boards, and the two prisoners were delivered to their custody by Nicholas.

"Howd!" cried the man; "Ey win no longer deny my name. Ey am Jem Device, an this is my mother, Elizabeth. Boh a warse offender than either on us stonds afore yo. This woman is Nance Redferne, grandowter of the owd hag Mother Chattox. Ey charge her wi' makin' wax images, an' stickin' pins in 'em, wi' intent to kill folk. Hoo wad ha' kilt me mysel', wi' her devilry, if ey hadna bin too strong for her—an' that 's why hoo bears me malice, an' has betrayed me to Squoire Nicholas Assheton. Seize her, an' ca' me as a witness agen her."

And as Nance was secured, he laughed malignantly.

"Ey care not," replied Nance. "Ey am now revenged on you both."

While this impromptu performance took place, as much to the surprise of James as of any one else, and while he was desiring Sir Richard Hoghton to ascertain what it all meant — at the very moment that the two Devices and Nance removed from the stage, an usher approached the Monarch, and said that Master Potts entreated a moment's audience of his Majesty.

"Potts!" exclaimed James, somewhat confused. "Wha is he? — ah, yes! I recollect — a witch-finder. Weel, let him approach."

Accordingly, the next moment the little attorney, whose face was evidently charged with some tremendous intelligence, was ushered into the King's presence.

After a profound reverence, he said, "May it please your Majesty, I have something for your private ear."

"Aweel, then," replied James, "approach us mair closely. What hae ye got to say, Sir? Aught mair anent these witches?"

"A great deal, Sire," said Potts, in an impressive tone. "Something dreadful has happened — something terrible."

"Eh! what!" exclaimed James, looking alarmed. "What is it, man? Speak!"

"Murder, Sire, — murder has been done," said Potts, in low thrilling accents.

"Murder!" exclaimed James, horror-stricken. "Tell us a' about it and without more ado."

But Potts was still circumspect. With an air of deepest mystery, he approached his head as near as he dared to that of the Monarch, and whispered in his ear.

"Can this be true?" cried James. "If sae — it is very shocking — very sad."

"It is too true, as your Majesty will find on investigation," replied Potts. "The little girl I told you of, Jennet Device, saw it done."

"Weel, weel, there is nae accounting for human frailty and wickedness," said James. "Let a' necessary steps be taken at once. We will consider what to do. But dy'e hear, Sir — dinna let the bairn Jennet go. Haud her fast. D'ye mind that? Now go, and cause the guilty party to be put under arrest."

And on receiving this command Master Potts departed.

Scarcely was he gone, than Nicholas Assheton came up to the railing of the platform, and imploring his Majesty's forgiveness for the disturbance he had occasioned, explained that it had been owing to the seizure of the two Devices, who for some wicked but unexplained purpose, had contrived to introduce themselves, under various disguises, into the Tower.

"Ye did right to arrest the miscreants, Sir," said James. "But hae ye heard what has happened?"

"No, my liege," replied Nicholas, alarmed by the King's manner, "what is it?"

"Come nearer, and ye shall learn," replied James, "for we wadna hae it bruited abroad, though if true, as we canna doubt, it will be known soon enough."

And as the squire bent forward, he imparted some intelligence to him, which instantly changed the expression of the latter to one of mingled horror and rage.

"It is false, Sire," he cried. "I will answer for her innocence with my life. She could not do it. Your Majesty's patience is abused. It is Jennet who has done it — not she. But I will unravel the terrible mystery. You have the other two wretches prisoners, and can enforce the truth from them."

"We will essay to do so," replied James; "but we have also another prisoner."

"Christopher Demdike," said Nicholas.

"Ay, Christopher Demdike," rejoined James. "But another besides him — Mistress Nutter. You stare, Sir; but it is true. She is in yonder pavilion. We ken fu' weel wha assisted her flight, and wha concealed her. Master Potts has told us a'. It is weel fo' you that your puir kinsman, Richard Assheton, did us sic gude service at the boar-hunt to-day. We shall not now be unmindful of it, even though he cannot send us the ring we gave him."

"It is here, Sire," replied Nicholas. "It was stolen from him by the villain Jem Device. The poor youth meant to use it for Alizon. I now deliver it to your Majesty as coming from him in her behalf."

"And we sae receive it," replied the Monarch, brushing away the moisture that gathered thickly in his eyes.

At this moment, a tall personage, wrapped in a cloak, who appeared to be an officer of the guard, approached the railing.

"I am come to inform your Majesty that Christopher Demdike has just died of his wounds," said this personage.

"And sae, he has had a strae death after a'," rejoined James. "Weel, we are sorry for it."

"His portion will be eternal bale," observed the officer.

"How know you that, Sir?" demanded the King, sharply. "You are not his judge."

"I witnessed his end, Sire," replied the officer; "and no man who died as he died can be saved. The Fiend was beside him at the death-throes."

"Save us!" exclaimed James. "Ye dinna say so? God's santie! man, but this is grewsome, and gars the flesh creep on one's banes. Let his foul carcase be taen awa', and hangit on a gibbet on the hill where Malkin Tower aince stood, as a warning to a' sic heinous offenders."

As the King ceased speaking, Master Potts appeared, out of breath and greatly excited.

"She has escaped, Sire," he cried.

"Wha! Jennet!" exclaimed James. "If sae, we will hang you in her stead."

"No, Sire, Alizon," replied Potts. "I can no where find her; nor —" and he hesitated.

"Weel — weel — it is nae great matter," replied James, as if relieved, and with a glance of satisfaction at Nicholas.

"I know where Alizon is, Sire," said the officer.

"Indeed!" exclaimed James. "This fellow is strangely officious," he muttered to himself. "And where may she be, Sir?" he added, aloud.

"I will produce her within a quarter of an hour in yonder pavilion," replied the officer, — "and all that Master Potts has been unable to find."

"Your Majesty may trust him," observed Nicholas, who had attentively regarded the officer. "Depend upon it he will make good his words."

"You think so?" cried the King. "Then we will put him to the test. You will engage to confront Alizon with her mother?" he added, to the officer.

"I will, Sire," replied the other. "But I shall require the assistance of a dozen men."

"Take twenty if you will," replied the King, — "I am impatient to see what you can do."

"In a quarter of a minute all shall be ready within the pavilion, Sire," replied the officer. "You have seen one masque to-night — but you shall now behold a different one — the masque of death."

And he disappeared.

Nicholas felt sure he would accomplish his task, for he had recognised in him the Cistertian monk.

"Where is Sir Richard Assheton, of Middleton?" inquired the King.

"He left the Tower with his daughter Dorothy, immediately after the banquet," replied Nicholas.

"I am glad of it — right glad," replied the Monarch; "the terrible intelligence can be the better broken to them. If it had come upon them suddenly, it might have been fatal — especially to the puir lassie. Let Sir Ralph Assheton, of Whalley, come to me — and Master Roger Nowell, of Read."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," replied Sir Richard Hoghton.

The King then gave some instructions respecting the prisoners, and bade Master Potts have Jennet in readiness.

And now to see what terrible thing had happened.

CHAPTER XI.

Fatality.

ALONG the eastern terrace a youth and maiden were pacing slowly. They had stolen forth unperceived from the revel, and passing through a door standing invitingly open had entered the garden. Though overjoyed in each other's presence, the solemn beauty of the night, so powerful in its contrast to the riotous scene they had just quitted, profoundly impressed them. Above, were the deep serene heavens, lighted up by the starry host and their radiant queen — below, the immemorial woods, steeped in silvery mists arising from the stream flowing past them. All nature was hushed in holy rest. In opposition to the flood of soft light emanating from the lovely planet over-head, and which turned all it fell on, whether tree, or tower, or stream, to beauty, was the artificial glare caused by the torches near the pavilion; while the discordant sounds occasioned by the minstrels tuning their in-

struments, disturbed the repose. As they went on, however, these sounds were lost in the distance, and the glare of the torches was excluded by intervening trees. Then the moon looked down lovingly upon them, and the only music that reached their ears arose from the nightingales. After a pause, they walked on again, hand-in-hand, gazing at each other, at the glorious heavens, and drinking in the thrilling melody of the songsters of the grove.

At the angle of the terrace was a small arbour placed in the midst of a bosquet, and they sat down within it. Then, and not till then, did their thoughts find vent in words. Forgetting the sorrows they had endured, and the perils by which they were environed, they found in their deep mutual love a shield against the sharpest arrows of fate. In low gentle accents they breathed their passion, solemnly plighting their faith before all-seeing heaven.

Poor souls! they were happy then — intensely happy. Alas! that their happiness should be so short, for those few moments of bliss, stolen from a waste of tears, were all that were allowed them. Inexorable fate still dogged their footsteps.

Amidst the bosquet stood a listener to their converse — a little girl with high shoulders and sharp features, on which diabolical malice was stamped. Two yellow eyes glistened through the leaves beside her, marking the presence of a cat. As the lovers breathed their vows, and indulged in hopes never to be realised, the wicked child grinned, clenched her hands, and grudging them their short-lived happiness, seemed inclined to interrupt it. Some stronger motive, however, kept her quiet.

What are the pair talking of now? — She hears her own name mentioned by the maiden, who speaks of her with pity, almost with affection — pardons her for the mischief she has

done her, and hopes heaven will pardon her likewise. But she knows not the full extent of the girl's malignity, or even her gentle heart must have been roused to resentment.

The little girl, however, feels no compunction. Infernal malice has taken possession of her heart, and crushed every kindly feeling within it. She hates all those that compassionate her, and returns evil for good.

What are the lovers talking of now? Of their first meeting at Whalley Abbey, when one was May Queen, and by her beauty and simplicity won the other's heart, losing her own at the same time. A bright unclouded career seemed to lie before them then. Wofully had it darkened since. Alas! Alas!

The little girl smiles. She hopes they will go on. She likes to hear them talk thus. Past happiness is ever remembered with a pang by the wretched, and they *were* happy then. Go on — go on.

But they are silent for awhile, for they wish to dwell on that hopeful, that blissful season. And a nightingale alighting on a bough above them, pours forth its sweet plaint, as if in response to their tender emotions. They praise the bird's song, and it suddenly ceases.

For the little girl, full of malevolence, stretches forth her hand, and it drops to the ground, as if stricken by a dart.

"Is thy heart broken, poor bird?" exclaimed the young man, taking up the hapless songster, yet warm and palpitating. "To die in the midst of thy song — 't is hard."

"Very hard," replied the maiden, tearfully. "Its fate seems a type of our own."

The little girl laughed, but in a low tone, and to herself.

The pair then grew sad. This slight incident had touched them deeply, and their conversation took a melancholy turn. They spoke of the blights that had nipped their love in the

bud — of the canker that had eaten into its heart — of the destiny that so relentlessly pursued them, threatening to separate them for ever.

The little girl laughed merrily.

Then they spoke of the grave — and of hope beyond the grave. And they spoke cheerfully.

The little girl could laugh no longer, for with her, all beyond the grave was despair.

After that they spoke of the terrible power that Satan had lately obtained in that unhappy district — of the arts he had employed — and of the votaries he had won. Both prayed fervently that his snares might be circumvented, and his rule destroyed.

During this part of the discourse the cat swelled to the size of a tiger, and his eyes glowed like fiery coals. He made a motion as if he would spring forward, but the voice of prayer arrested him, and he shrank back to his former size.

"Poor Jennet is ensnared by the Fiend," murmured the maiden, "and will perish eternally. Would I could save her!"

"It cannot be," replied the young man. "She is beyond redemption."

The little girl gnashed her teeth with rage.

"But my mother — I do not now despair of her," said Alizon. "She has broken the bondage by which she was enchained, and if she resists temptation to the last, I am assured will be saved."

"Heaven aid her!" exclaimed Richard.

Scarcely were the words uttered, than the cat disappeared.

"Why, Tib! — were are yo, Tib? Ey want yo," cried the little girl, in a low tone.

But the familiar did not respond to the call.

"Where con he ha' gone?" cried Jennet, — "Tib! — Tib!"

Still, the cat came not.

"Then ey mun do the wark without him," pursued the little girl; "an ey win no longer delay it."

And with this, she crept stealthily round the arbour, and approaching the side where Richard sat, watched an opportunity of touching him unperceived.

As her finger came in contact with his frame, a pang like death shot through his heart, and he fell upon Alizon's shoulder.

"Are you ill?" she exclaimed, gazing at his pallid features, rendered ghastly white by the moonlight.

Richard could make no reply, and Alizon, becoming dreadfully alarmed, was about to fly for assistance, but the young man, by a great effort, detained her.

"Ey mun now run an tell Mester Potts, so that hoo may be found wi' him," muttered Jennet, creeping away.

Just then, Richard recovered his speech, but his words were faintly uttered, and with difficulty.

"Alizon," he said, "I will not attempt to disguise my condition from you. I am dying. And my death will be attributed to you, for evil-minded persons have persuaded the King that you have bewitched me, and he will believe the charge now. Oh! if you would ease the pangs of death for me — if you would console my latest moments — leave me, and quit this place, before it be too late."

"Oh! Richard," she cried distractedly, "you ask more than I can perform. If you are indeed in such imminent danger, I will stay with you — will die with you."

"No, live for me — live — save yourself, Alizon," implored the young man. "Your danger is greater than mine. A dreadful death awaits you — at the stake! — Oh! mercy —

mercy, heaven! — Spare her — in pity spare her! — Have we not suffered enough? I can no more. Farewell for ever, Alizon — one kiss — the last."

And as their lips met, his strength utterly forsook him, and he fell backwards.

"One grave," he murmured, "one grave, Alizon," — And so, without a groan, he expired.

Alizon neither screamed nor swooned, but remained in a state of stupefaction, gazing at the body. As the moon fell upon the placid features, they looked as if locked in slumber.

There he lay — the young, the brave, the beautiful, the loving, the beloved. Fate had triumphed. Death had done his work — but he had only performed half his task.

"One grave — one grave — it was his last wish — it shall be so," she cried, in frenzied tones. "I shall thus escape my enemies, and avoid the horrible and shameful death to which they would doom me."

And she snatched the dagger from the ill-fated youth's side.

"Now, fate, I defy thee!" she cried, with a fearful laugh.

One last look at that calm beautiful face — one kiss of the cold lips, which can no more return the endearment, and the dagger is pointed at her breast.

But she is withheld by an arm of iron, and the weapon falls from her grasp. She looks up. A tall figure, clothed in the mouldering habiliments of a Cistertian monk, stands beside her. She knows the vestments at once, for she has seen them before, hanging up in the closet adjoining her mother's chamber at Whalley Abbey — and the features of the ghostly monk seem familiar to her.

"Raise not thy hand against thyself," said the phantom, in a tone of awful reproof. "It is the Fiend prompts thee to do it. He would take advantage of thy misery to destroy thee."

"I took thee for the Fiend," replied Alizon, gazing at him with wonder rather than with terror. "Who art thou?"

"The enemy of thy enemies, and therefore thy friend," replied the monk. "I would have saved thy lover if I could, but his destiny was not to be averted. But, rest content, I will avenge him."

"I do not want vengeance — I want to be with him," she replied, frantically embracing the body.

"Thou wilt soon be with him," said the phantom, in tones of deep significance. "Arise, and come with me. Thy mother needs thy assistance."

"My mother!" exclaimed Alizon, clcaring the blinding tresses from her brow. "Where is she?"

"Follow me, and I will bring thee to her," said the monk.

"And leave him — I cannot," cried Alizon, gazing wildly at the body.

"You must. A soul is at stake, and will perish if you come not," said the monk. "He is at rest, and you will speedily rejoin him."

"With that assurance, I will go," replied Alizon, with a last look at the object of her love. "One grave — lay us in one grave."

"It shall be done according to your wish," said the monk.

And he glided on with noiseless footsteps.

Alizon followed him along the terrace.

Presently, they came to a dark yew-tree walk, leading to a labyrinth, and tracking it swiftly, as well as the over-arched and intricate path to which it conducted, they entered a grotto, whence a flight of steps descended to a subterranean passage, hewn out of the rock. Along this passage, which was of some extent, the monk proceeded, and Alizon followed him.

At last, they came to another flight of steps, and here the monk stopped.

"We are now beneath the pavilion, where you will find your mother," he said. "Mount! the way is clear before you. I have other work to do."

Alizon obeyed; and as she advanced, was surprised to find the monk gone. He had neither passed her nor ascended the steps, and must, therefore, have sunk into the earth.

CHAPTER XII.

The last hour.

WITHIN the pavilion sat Alice Nutter. She was clad in deep mourning, but her dress seemed disordered as if by hasty travel. Her looks were full of anguish and terror; her blanched tresses, once so dark and beautiful, hung dishevelled over her shoulders; and her thin hands were clasped in supplication. Her cheeks were ashy pale, but on her brow was a bright red mark, as if traced by a finger dipped in blood.

A lamp was burning on the table beside her. Near it was a scull, and near this emblem of mortality, an hour-glass, running fast.

The windows and doors of the building were closed, and it would seem the unhappy lady was a prisoner.

She had been brought there secretly that night, with what intent she knew not, but she felt sure it was with no friendly design towards herself. Early in the day three horsemen had arrived at her retreat in Pendle Forest, and without making any charge against her, or explaining whither they meant to take her, or indeed answering any inquiry, had brought her off with them, and proceeding across the country, had arrived at a forester's hut on the outskirts of Hoghton Park. Here they tarried till evening, placing her in a room by herself, and keep-

ing strict watch over her; and when the shadows of night fell, they conveyed her through the woods, and by a private entrance to the gardens of the Tower, and with equal secresy to the pavilion, where, setting a lamp before her, they left her to her meditations. All refused to answer her inquiries, but one of them with a sinister smile, placed the hour-glass and scull beside her.

Left alone, the wretched lady vainly sought some solution of the enigma, — why she had been brought thither. She could not solve it, but she determined if her capture had been made by any lawful authorities, to confess her guilt and submit to condign punishment.

Though the windows and doors were closed as beforementioned, sounds from without reached her, and she heard confused and tumultuous noises as if from a large assemblage. For what purpose were they met? Could it be for her execution? No — there were strains of music, and bursts of laughter. And yet she had heard that the burning of a witch was a spectacle in which the populace delighted — that they looked upon it as a show, like any other; and why should they not laugh, and have music at it? But could she be executed without trial, without judgment? She knew not. All she knew was she was guilty, and deserved to die. But when this idea took possession of her, the laughter sounded in her ears like the yells of demons, and the strains like the fearful harmonies she had heard at weird Sabbaths.

All at once, she recollected with indescribable terror, that on this very night, the compact she had entered into with the Fiend, expired. That at midnight, unless by her penitence and prayers, she had worked out her salvation, he could claim her. She recollected also, and with increased uneasiness, that the man who had set the hour-glass on the table, and who had

regarded her with a sinister smile as he did so, had said it was eleven o'clock!

Her last hour then had arrived—nay, was partly spent, and the moments were passing swiftly by.

The agony she endured at this thought was intense. She felt as if reason were forsaking her, and but for her determined efforts to resist it, such a crisis might have occurred. But she knew that her eternal welfare depended upon the preservation of her mental balance, and she strove to maintain it, and in the end succeeded.

Her gaze was fixed intently on the hour-glass. She saw the sand trickling silently but swiftly down, like a current of life-blood, which, when it ceased, life would cease with it. She saw the shining grains above insensibly diminishing in quantity, and as if she could arrest her destiny by the act, she seized the glass, and would have turned it, but the folly of the proceeding arrested her, and she set it down again.

Then horrible thoughts came upon her, crushing her and overwhelming her, and she felt by anticipation all the torments she would speedily have to endure. Oceans of fire, in which miserable souls were for ever tossing, rolled before her. Yells, such as no human anguish can produce, smote her ears. Monsters of frightful form yawned to devour her. Fiends, armed with terrible implements of torture, such as the wildest imagination cannot paint, menaced her. All hell, and its horrors, was there, its dreadful gulf, its roaring furnaces, its rivers of molten metal, ever burning, yet never consuming, its victims. A hot sulphureous atmosphere oppressed her, and a film of blood dimmed her sight.

She endeavoured to pray, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She looked about for her Bible, but it had been left behind when she was taken from her retreat. She had no safe-guard — none.

Still, the sand ran on.

New agonies assailed her. Hell was before her again, but in a new form, and with new torments. She closed her eyes. She shut her ears. But she saw it still, and heard its terrific yells.

Again she consults the hour-glass. The sand is running on — ever diminishing.

New torments assail her. She thinks of all she loves most on earth — of her daughter! Oh, if Alizon were near her, she might pray for her — might scare away these frightful visions — might save her. She calls to her — but she answers not. No, she is utterly abandoned of God and man, and must perish eternally.

Again she consults the hour-glass. One quarter of an hour is all that remains to her. Oh! that she could employ it in prayer! Oh! that she could kneel — or even weep.

A large mirror hangs against the wall, and she is drawn towards it by an irresistible impulse. She sees a figure within it — but she does not know herself. Can that cadaverous object, with the white hair, that seems newly-arisen from the grave, be she? It must be a phantom. No — she touches her cheek, and finds it is real. But, ah! what is this red brand upon her brow? It must be the seal of the demon. She tries to efface it — but it will not come out. On the contrary, it becomes redder and deeper.

Again she consults the glass. The sand is still running on. How many minutes remain to her?

"Ten," cried a voice, replying to her mental inquiry. — "Ten."

And turning, she perceived her familiar standing beside her.

"Thy time is well nigh out, Alice Nutter," he said. "In ten minutes my lord will claim thee."

"My compact with thy master is broken," she replied, summoning up all her resolution. "I have long ceased to use the power bestowed upon me, but even if I had wished it, thou hast refused to serve me."

"I have refused to serve you, Madam, because you have disobeyed the express injunctions of my master," replied the familiar, "but your apostacy does not free you from bondage. You have merely lost advantages which you might have enjoyed. If you chose to dismiss me I could not help it. Neither I nor my lord have been to blame. We have performed our part of the contract."

"Why am I brought hither?" demanded Mistress Nutter.

"I will tell you," replied the familiar. "You were brought here by order of the King. Your retreat was revealed to him by Master Potts, who learnt it from Jennet Device. The sapient sovereign intended to confront you with your daughter Alizon, who, like yourself, is accused of witchcraft; but he will be disappointed — for when he comes for you, you will be out of his reach — ha! ha!"

And he rubbed his hands at the jest.

"Alizon accused of witchcraft — sayst thou?" cried Mistress Nutter.

"Ay," replied the familiar. "She is suspected of bewitching Richard Assheton, who has been done to death by Jennet Device. For one so young, the little girl has certainly a rare turn for mischief. But no one will know the real author of the crime, and Alizon will suffer for it."

"Heaven will not suffer such iniquity," said the lady.

"As you have nothing to do with Heaven, Madam, it is needless to refer to it," said the familiar. "But it certainly is rather hard that one so young as Alizon should perish."

"Can you save her?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"Oh! yes, I *could* save her, but she will not let me," replied the familiar, with a grin.

"No — no — it is impossible," cried the wretched woman. "And I cannot help her."

"Perhaps you might," observed the tempter. "My master, whom you accuse of harshness, is ever willing to oblige you. You have a few minutes left — do you wish him to aid her? Command me, and I will obey you."

"This is some snare," thought Mistress Nutter; "I will resist it."

"You cannot be worse off than you are," remarked the familiar.

"I know not that," replied the lady. "What would'st thou do?"

"Whatever you command me, Madam. I can do nothing of my own accord. Shall I bring your daughter here. Say so, and it shall be done."

"No — thou would'st ensnare me," she replied. "I well know thou hast no power over her. Thou would'st place some phantasm before me. I would see her, but not through thy agency."

"She is here," cried Alizon, opening the door of a closet, and rushing towards her mother, who instantly locked her in her arms.

"Pray for me, my child," cried Mistress Nutter, mastering her emotion, "or I shall be snatched from you for ever. My moments are numbered. Pray — pray!"

Alizon fell on her knees, and prayed fervently.

"You waste your breath," cried the familiar, in a mocking tone. "Never till the brand shall disappear from her brow, and the writing, traced in her blood, shall vanish from this parchment, can she be saved. She is mine."

"Pray, Alizon, pray," shrieked Mistress Nutter.

"I will tear her in pieces if she does not cease," cried the familiar, assuming a terrible shape, and menacing her with claws like those of a wild beast.

"Pray thou, mother," cried Alizon.

"I cannot," replied the lady.

"I will kill her, if she but makes the attempt," howled the demon.

"But try, mother, try," cried Alizon.

The poor lady dropped on her knees, and raised her hands in humble supplication — "Heaven forgive me," she exclaimed.

The demon seized the hour-glass.

"The sand is out — her term is expired — she is mine," he cried.

"Clasp thy arms tightly round me, my child. He cannot take me from thee," shrieked the agonized woman.

"Release her, Alizon, or I will slay thee likewise," roared the demon.

"Never," she replied; "thou canst not overcome me. Ha!" she added, joyfully, "the brand has disappeared from her brow."

"And the writing from the parchment," howled the demon; "but I will have her notwithstanding."

And he plunged his claws into Alice Nutter's flesh. But her daughter held her fast.

"Oh! hold me, my child—hold me, or I am lost," shrieked the lady.

"Be warned, and let her go, or thy life shall pay for her's," cried the demon.

"My life for her's, willingly," replied Alizon.

"Then take thy fate," rejoined the evil spirit.

And placing his hand upon her heart, it instantly ceased to beat.

"Mother, thou art saved — saved!" exclaimed Alizon, throwing out her arms.

And gazing at her for an instant with a seraphic look, she fell backwards, and expired.

"Thou art mine," roared the demon, seizing Mistress Nutter by the hair, and dragging her from her daugther's body, to which she clung desperately.

"Help! — help!" she cried.

"Thou mayst call, but thy cries will be unheeded," rejoined the familiar, with mocking laughter.

"Thou liest, false fiend," said Mistress Nutter. "Heaven will help me now."

And, as she spoke, the Cistertian monk stood before them.

"Hence!" he cried, with an imperious gesture to the demon. "She is no longer in thy power. Hence!"

And with a howl of rage and disappointment the familiar vanished.

"Alice Nutter," continued the monk, "thy safety has been purchased at the price of thy daughter's life. But it is of little moment, for she could not live long. Her gentle heart was broken, and when the demon stopped it for ever, he performed unintentionally a merciful act. She must rest in the same grave with him she loved so well during life. This tell to those who will come to thee anon. Thou art delivered from the yoke of Satan. Full expiation has been made. But earthly justice must be satisfied. Thou must pay the penalty for crimes committed in the flesh, but what thou sufferest here shall avail thee hereafter."

"I am content," she replied.

"Pass the rest of thy life in penitence and prayer," pursued the monk, "and let nothing divert thee from it, for though free now, thou wilt be subject to evil influence and temptations to the last. Remember this."

"I will — I will," she rejoined.

"And now," he said, "kneel beside thy daughter's body and pray. I will return to thee ere many minutes be passed. One task more, and then my mission is ended."

CHAPTER XIII.

The masque of death.

SHORT time as he had to await, James was unable to control his impatience. At last he arose, and completely sobered by the recent strange events, descended the steps of the platform, and walked on without assistance.

"Let the yeomen of the guard keep back the crowd," he said to an officer, "and let none follow me but Sir Ralph Assheton, Master Nicholas Assheton, and Master Roger Nowell. When I call, let the prisoners be brought forward."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," replied the baronet, giving the necessary directions.

James then moved slowly forward in the direction of the pavilion, and, as he went, called Nicholas Assheton to him.

"Wha was that officer?" he asked.

"Your pardon, my liege, but I cannot answer the question," replied Nicholas.

"And why not, Sir?" demanded the Monarch, sharply.

"For reasons I will hereafter render to your Majesty, and which I am persuaded you will find satisfactory," rejoined the squire.

"Weel, weel, I dare say you are right," said the King. "But do you think he will keep his word?"

"I am sure of it," returned Nicholas.

"The time is come, then," exclaimed James, impatiently, and looking up at the pavilion.

"The time is come," echoed a sepulchral voice.

"Did you speak?" inquired the Monarch.

"No, Sire," replied Nicholas; "but some one seemed to give you intimation that all is ready. Will it please you to go on?"

"Enter," cried the voice.

"Wha speaks?" demanded the King. And as no answer was returned, he continued — "I will not set foot in the structure. It may be a snare of Satan."

At this moment the shutters of the windows flew open, showing that the pavilion was lighted up by many tapers within, while solemn strains of music issued from it.

"Enter," repeated the voice.

"Have no fear, Sire," said Nicholas.

"That canna be the wark o' the Deil," cried James. "He does not delight in holy hymns and sweet music."

"That is a solemn dirge for the dead," observed Nicholas, as melodious voices mingled with the music.

"Weel, weel, I will go on, at a' hazards," said James.

The doors flew open as the King and his attendants approached, and as soon as they had passed through them, the valves swung back to their places.

A strange sad spectacle met their gaze. In the midst of the chamber stood a bier, covered with a velvet pall, and on it the bodies of a youth and maiden were deposited. Pale and beautiful were they, as sculptured marble, and a smile sat upon their features. Side by side they were lying, with their arms enfolded, as if they had died in each other's embrace. A wreath of yew and cypress was placed above their heads, and flowers were scattered round them.

They were Richard and Alizon.

It was a deeply touching sight, and for some time none spake. The solemn dirge continued, interrupted only by the stifled sobs of the listeners.

"Both gone!" exclaimed Nicholas, in accents broken by emotion; "and so young — so good — so beautiful! Alas! alas!"

"She could not have bewitched him," said the King.

"Alizon was all purity and goodness," cried Nicholas, "and is now numbered with the angels."

"The guilty one is in thy hands, O! King," said the voice. "It is for thee to punish."

"And I will not hold my hand," said James. "The Devices shall assuredly perish. When I go from this chamber, I will have them conveyed under a strong escort to Lancaster Castle. They shall die by the hands of the common executioner."

"My mission, then, is complete," replied the voice. "I can rest in peace."

"Who art thou?" demanded the King.

"One who sinned deeply, but is now pardoned;" replied the voice.

The King was for a moment lost in reflection, and then turned to depart. At this moment, a kneeling figure, whom no one had hitherto noticed, arose from behind the bier. It was a lady, robed in mourning. So ghastly pale were her features, and so skeleton-like her attenuated frame, that James thought he beheld a spectre, and recoiled in terror. The figure advanced slowly towards him.

"Who, and what art thou, in Heaven's name?" he exclaimed.

"I am Alice Nutter, Sire," replied the lady, prostrating herself before him.

"Alice Nutter, the witch," cried the King. "Why ay, I recollect thou wert here. I sent for thee, but recent terrible events had put thee clean out of my head. But expect no grace from me, evil woman. I will show thee none."

"I ask none, Sire," replied the penitent. "I came to place myself in your hands, that justice may be done upon me."

"Ah!" exclaimed James. "Dost thou, indeed, repent thee of thy iniquities? Dost thou abjure the Devil and all his works?"

"I do," replied the lady, fervently. My compact with the Evil One has been broken by the prayers of my devoted daughter, who sacrificed herself for me, and thereby saved my soul alive. But human justice requires an expiation, and I am anxious to make it."

"Arise, ill-fated woman," said the King, much moved. "You must go to Lancaster, but in consideration of your penitence, no indignity shall be shown you. You must be strictly guarded, but you shall not be taken with the other prisoners."

"I humbly thank your Majesty," replied the lady. "May I take a last farewell of my child?"

"Do so," replied James.

Alice Nutter then approached the bier, and after gazing for a moment with deepest fondness upon the features of her daughter, imprinted a kiss upon her marble brow. In doing this, her tears fell fast.

"You can weep, I see," observed the King. "You are a witch no longer."

"Ay, Heaven be praised! I can weep," she replied; "and so ease my over-burthened heart. Oh! Sire, none but those who have experienced it can tell the agony of being denied this relief of nature. Farewell for ever, my blessed child!" she exclaimed, kissing her brow again; "and you, too, her beloved. Nicholas Assheton, — it was her wish to be buried in the same grave with Richard. You will see it done, Nicholas?"

"I will — I will," replied the squire, in a voice of deepest emotion.

"And I likewise promise it," said Sir Ralph Assheton. "They shall rest together in Whalley church-yard. It is well that Sir Richard and Dorothy are gone," he observed to Nicholas.

"It is indeed," said the squire, "or we should have had another funeral to perform. Pray heaven it be not so now!"

"Have you any other request to prefer?" demanded the King.

"None 'whatever Sire," replied the lady, "except that I wish to make full restitution of all the land I have robbed him of, to Master Roger Nowell, and as some compensation I would fain add certain lands adjoining, which have been conveyed over to Sir Ralph and Nicholas Assheton, only annexing the condition that a small sum annually be given in dole to the poor of the parish, that I may be remembered in their prayers."

"We will see it done," said Sir Ralph and Nicholas.

"And I will see my part fulfilled," said Nowell. "For any wrong you have done me I now freely and fully forgive you, and may heaven in its infinite mercy forgive you likewise."

"Amen!" ejaculated the Monarch. And all the others joined in the ejaculation.

The King then moved to the door which was opened for him by the two Asshetons. At the foot of the steps stood Master Potts attended by an officer of the guard and a party of halberdiers. In the midst of them, with their hands tied behind their backs, were Jem Device, his mother, Jennet, and poor Nance Redferne. Jem looked dogged and sullen — Elizabeth downcast — but Jennet retained her accustomed malignant expression. Poor Nance was the only one who excited any sympathy. Jennet's malice seemed now directed

against Master Potts, whom she charged with having betrayed and deceived her.

"If Tib had na deserted me he should tear thee i' pieces, thou ill-favourt little monster," she cried.

"Monster in your own face, you hideous little wretch," exclaimed the indignant attorney. "If you use such opprobrious epithets I will have you gagged. You will be taken to Lancaster Castle, and hanged."

"Yo are os bad os ey am, and warse," replied Jennet, "and deserve hanging os weel, and the King shan knoa of your tricks," she vociferated, as James appeared at the door of the pavilion. "Yo wished to ensnare Alizon. Yo wished me to kill her. Ey was only your instrument."

"Stop her mouth — gag her," cried Potts.

"Nah, nah! — they shanna stap my mouth — they shanna gag me," cried Jennet. "Ey win speak out. The King shan hear me. You are os bad os me."

"All malice, your Majesty — all malice," cried the attorney.

"Malice, nae doubt, in great pairt," replied James; "but some truth as weel I fear, Sir. And in any case it will prevent my doing any thing for you."

"There, you have ruined my hopes, you little wretch!" cried Potts, furiously.

"Ey 'm reet glad on 't," said Jennet. "Yo may tay me to Lonkester Castle, boh yo conna hong me. Ey knoa that fu' weel. Ey shan get out, and then look to yersel, lad; for, os sure os ey 'm Mother Demdike's gran'-dowter, ey 'n plague the life out o' ye."

"Take the prisoners away, and let them be conveyed under a strict escort to Lancaster Castle," said James.

"And as the assizes commence next week, quick work will be made with them, your Majesty," observed Potts. "Their

guilt can be incontestably proved, so they are sure to be found guilty, — sure to be hanged, Sire."

As the prisoners were removed, Nance Redferne looked round her, and catching the eye of Nicholas, made a slight motion with her head, as if bidding him farewell.

The squire returned the mute valediction.

"Poor Nance," he exclaimed, compassionately, "I sincerely pity her. Would there was any means of saving her!"

"There is none," observed Sir Ralph Assheton. "And you may be thankful you are not brought in as her accomplice."

As Jennet was taken away, she continued to hurl threats and imprecations against Potts.

Another officer of the guard was then summoned, and when he came, James said, "One other prisoner remains within the pavilion. She likewise must be conveyed to Lancaster Castle, — but in a litter, and not with the other prisoners."

Attended by Sir Richard Hoghton, the Monarch then proceeded to his lodgings in the Tower.

CHAPTER XIV.

"One grave."

NOTWITHSTANDING the sad occurrences above detailed, James remained for two more days the guest of Sir Richard Hoghton, enjoying his princely hospitality, hunting in the park, carousing in the great hall, and witnessing all kinds of sports.

Nothing, indeed, was left to remind him of the sad events that had occurred. The prisoners were taken that night to Lancaster Castle, and Master Potts accompanied the escort to be ready for the assizes. The three judges proceeded thither

at the end of the week. The attendance of Roger Nowell, Nicholas, and Sir Ralph Assheton, was also required as witnesses at the trial of the witches.

"Sir Richard Assheton and Dorothy had returned as already stated, to Middleton, and though the intelligence of the death of Richard and Alizon was communicated to them with infinite caution, the shock to both was very great, especially to Dorothy, who was long — very long, in recovering from it.

Nicholas's vivacity of temperament made him feel the loss of his cousin at first very keenly, but it soon wore off. He vowed amendment and reformation on the model of John Bruen, whose life offered so striking a contrast to his own, that it has very properly been placed in opposition by a reverend moralist, but I regret to say that he did not carry out his praiseworthy intentions. He was apt to make a joke of John Bruen, instead of imitating his example. He professed to devote himself to his excellent wife — but his old habits would break out; and, I am sorry to say he was often to be found in the ale-house, and was just as fond of horse-racing, cock-fighting, hunting, fishing, and all other sports, as ever. Occasionally, he occupied a leisure or a rainy day with a Journal,* parts of which have been preserved, but he set down in it few of the terrible events here related, probably because they were of too painful a nature to be recorded. He died in 1625 — at the early age of thirty-five.

But to go back. A few days after the tragical events at Hoghton Tower, the whole village of Whalley was astir. But it was no festive occasion — no merry-making that called forth

* Published by the Chetham Society, and admirably edited, with notes, exhibiting an extraordinary amount of research and information by the Rev. F. R. Raines, M.A., F.S.A., of Milnrow Parsonage, near Rochdale.

the inhabitants, for grief sat upon every countenance. The day, too, was gloomy. The feathered summits of Whalley Nab were wreathed in mist, and a fine rain descended in the valley. The Calder looked dull and discoloured as it flowed past the walls of the ancient abbey. The church bell tolled mournfully, and a large concourse was gathered in the churchyard. Not far from one of the three crosses of Paulinus, which stood nearest the church porch, a grave had been digged, and almost every one looked into it. The grave, it was said, was intended to hold two coffins. Soon after this, a train of mourners issued from the ancient abbey gateway, and sure enough there were two coffins on the shoulders of the bearers. They were met at the gate by Doctor Ormerod, who was so deeply affected, as scarcely to be able to perform the needful offices for the dead. The principal mourners were Sir Richard Assheton, of Middleton, Sir Ralph Assheton, and Nicholas. Amid the tears and sobs of all the bystanders, the bodies of Richard and Alizon were committed to the earth — laid together in one grave.

Thus was their latest wish fulfilled. Flowers grew upon the turf that covered them, and there was the earliest primrose seen, and the latest violet. Many a fond youth and trusting maiden have visited their lowly tomb, and many a tear, fresh from the heart, has dropped upon the sod covering the ill-fated lovers.

CHAPTER XV.

Lancaster Castle.

BEHOLD the grim and giant fabric, re-built and strengthened by

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster!"

Within one of its turrets called John of Gaunt's Chair, and at even tide, stands a lady under the care of a jailor. It is the last sunset she will ever see — the last time she will look upon the beauties of earth, for she is a prisoner, condemned to die an ignominious and terrible death, and her execution will take place on the morrow. Leaving her alone within the turret, the jailor locks the door and stands outside it. The lady casts a long lingering look around. All nature seems so beautiful — so attractive. The sunset upon the broad watery sands of Morecombe Bay is exquisite in varied tints. The fells of Furness look black and bold, and the windings of the Lune are clearly traced out. But she casts a wistful glance towards the mountainous ridges of Lancashire, and fancies she can detect amongst the heights the rounded summit of Pendle Hill. Then her gaze settles upon the gray old town beneath her, and as her glance wanders over it, certain terrible objects arrest it. In the area before the Castle she sees a ring of tall stakes. She knows well their purpose, and counts them. They are thirteen in number. Thirteen wretched beings are to be burned on the morrow. Not far from the stakes are an enormous pile of fagots. All is prepared. Fascinated by the sight, she remains gazing at the place of execution for some time, and when she turns, she beholds a tall dark man standing beside her. At first she thinks it is the jailor, and is about to tell the man she is ready to descend to her cell, when she recognises him, and recoils in terror.

"Thou here — again!" she cried.

"I can save thee from the stake, if thou wilt, Alice Nutter," he said.

"Hence!" she exclaimed. "Thou temptest me in vain. Hence!"

And with a howl of rage, the demon disappeared.

Conveyed back to her cell, situated within the dread Dungeon Tower, Alice Nutter passed the whole of that night in prayer. Towards four o'clock, wearied out, she dropped into a slumber, and when the clergyman, from whom she had received spiritual consolation, came to her cell, he found her still sleeping, but with a sweet smile upon her lips, — the first he had ever beheld there.

Unwilling to disturb her, he knelt down, and prayed by her side. At length, the jailor came, and the executioner's aids. The divine then laid his hand upon her shoulder, and she instantly arose.

"I am ready," she said, cheerfully.

"You have had a happy dream, daughter," he observed.

"A blessed dream, reverend Sir," she replied. "I thought I saw my children — Richard and Alizon in a fair garden — oh! how angelic they looked — and they told me I should be with them soon."

"And I doubt not the vision will be realised," replied the clergyman. "Your redemption is fully worked out, and your salvation, I trust, secured. And now you must prepare for your last trial."

"I am fully prepared," she replied; "but will you not go to the others?"

"Alas! my dear daughter," he replied, "they all, excepting Nance Redferne, refuse my services, and will perish in their iniquities."

"Then go to her, Sir, I entreat of you," she said, "she may yet be saved. But what of Jennet? Is she, too, to die?"

"No," replied the divine; "being evidence against her relatives, her life is spared."

"Heaven grant she do no more mischief!" exclaimed Alice Nutter.

She then submitted herself to the executioner's assistants, and was led forth. On issuing into the open air a change came over her, and such an exceeding faintness, that she had to be supported. She was led towards the stake in this state; but she grew fainter and fainter, and at last fell back in the arms of the men that supported her. Still, they carried her on. When the executioner put out his hand to receive her from his aids, she was found to be quite dead. Nevertheless, he tied her to the stake, and her body was consumed. Hundreds of spectators beheld those terrible fires, and exulted in the torments of the miserable sufferers. Their shrieks and blasphemies were terrific, and the place resembled a hell upon earth.

Jennet escaped, to the dismay of Master Potts, who feared she would wreak her threatened vengeance upon him. And, indeed, he did suffer from aches and cramps, which he attributed to her; but which were more reasonably supposed to be owing to rheum caught in the marshes of Pendle Forest. He had, however, the pleasure of assisting at her execution, when some years afterwards retributive justice overtook her.

Jennet was the last of the Lancashire Witches. Ever since then witchraft has taken a new form with the ladies of the county, — though their fascination and spells are as potent as ever. Few can now escape them, — few desire to do so. But to all who are afraid of a bright eye and a blooming cheek, and who desire to adhere to a bachelor's condition — to such I should say "BEWARE OF THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES!"

THE END.

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